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CROMARTY:

Being a Tourist's Visit
to the birthplace of
HUGH MILLER

By

NICHOLAS DIXON

1858

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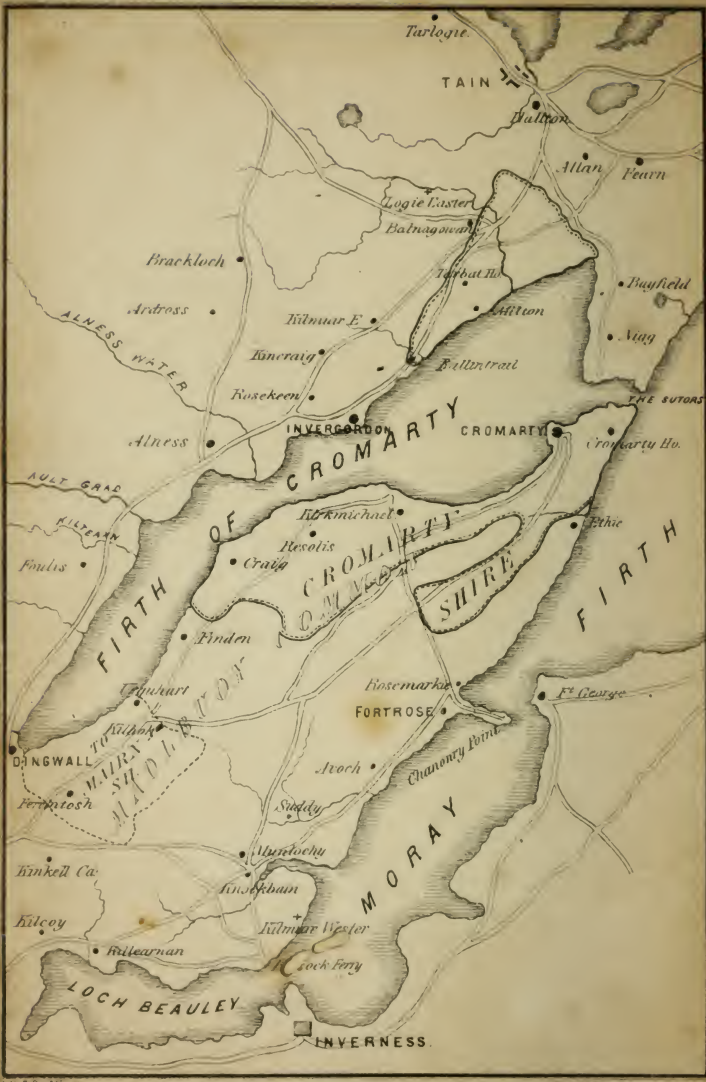
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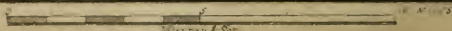
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CROMARTY:

BEING A

TOURIST'S VISIT TO THE BIRTH-PLACE OF HUGH MILLER.

BY

NICHOLAS DICKSON.

GLASGOW:
THOMAS MURRAY AND SON,
49 BUCHANAN STREET.

MDCCCLVIII.

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PREFACE.

THE writings of the late Mr Hugh Miller are so intimately connected with his native town, that those who have read and appreciated them can scarcely fail to take a deep interest in visiting this now celebrated locality. Everything in or around it reminds the visitor of some feature or other in the life, education, and character of the distinguished Geologist. It is essentially the school in which he was trained for those great and important duties which, in after life, he was called upon to perform. Thousands of tourists annually visit the scenery of Scotland depicted in the poetry of Sir Walter Scott and Robert Burns: if they will turn northwards, they will find that a no less interesting district awaits their arrival at Cromarty.

To the amateur in Geology, Cromarty possesses many special attractions. If he has read any work on the science at all, with care and attention, he will find to his great delight that the rocky scenery from which Hugh Miller drew his inspirations is well calculated to afford him many practical illustrations and lessons. It is all very good, in text-books, to look at stratified and

unstratified rocks, with all their phenomena of position, but it is very much better and much more instructive to see them in the book of Nature itself, down, it may be, in quarries, along the sea-shore, or in some romantic mountain glen. Cromarty furnishes such, and many other illustrations to the amateur Geologist. He finds there, too, plenty of work for his hammer, and that with skill in using it he may, in the course of a morning's ramble, pick up quite as many "specimens" as he can very well manage to carry. Finding fossils on geological excursions is like tasting blood in the combat; it is then that the real enthusiasm begins, which, if properly directed, may ultimately lead to some important discovery.

It was scarcely, however, as a Geologist that the writer of this little book visited Cromarty last summer—witness his setting out unprovided with even a hammer. It was rather as one who had read "My Schools and Schoolmasters," than one who had studied "The Old Red Sandstone." His visit partook much more of the nature of a literary pilgrimage than of a scientific expedition.

GLASGOW, 15th June, 1858.

VISIT TO CROMARTY.

CHAPTER FIRST.

INDUCED, BY THE READING OF HUGH MILLER'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY, TO VISIT CROMARTY—"THE GRANITE CITY"—MARISCHAL COLLEGE—THE BRIG O' DON—THOMAS THE RHYMER—INVERURY—THE ELGIN MUSEUM AND CATHEDRAL—ARRIVAL AT INVERNESS.

EARLY in the spring of eighteen hundred and fifty-seven I resolved, after rising from the re-perusal of a certain autobiographical work, to visit the place where its writer was born, and where he spent his youthful years. When my vacation at length arrived, bringing with it the pleasant, sunny days of June, I gladly turned my back upon professional duties for a while, set my face northwards, and looked forward with great interest to spending a few days at Cromarty,—a town which, from its associations, may truly be regarded as one of the most interesting and celebrated in Scotland. The writings of the author of "My Schools and Schoolmasters" have added to Scottish ground one more classic locality. As Abbotsford is inseparably asso-

ciated with the name of Sir Walter Scott, and Ayrshire with that of Robert Burns, so Cromarty is destined to share a like celebrity, for it will bear, graven upon its rocks for ever, the name and the memory of Hugh Miller.

On a bright and promising morning towards the end of June, I sailed from Granton Pier in one of the North of Scotland steamers, and after a pleasant passage, arrived at Aberdeen in the evening. It had been my intention, on first setting out, to proceed by steamer direct to Cromarty, but having never before seen the City of Granite, I went ashore there, and afterwards travelled across the country to Inverness, by way of Inverury and Elgin.

The evening at Aberdeen was a very different affair from the morning at Granton. No sooner had the steamer sighted the lighthouse at the entrance to the harbour of the former port, than, as if by some preconcerted signal, the rain began to fall; and by the time we had landed, it came down in such torrents that every cab on the nearest stand was hailed immediately, filled, and driven off with those passengers inside who had been fortunate enough to engage them first. I never saw a cab-stand so quickly cleared before; many who were left behind, and I was amongst the number, made the same observation. On the passage, a stranger had recommended me to "put up" during my stay in Aberdeen, at Forsyth's hotel, in Union Street; thither I accordingly repaired with all possible speed, and was soon so comfortably entertained that I forgot all about the rain for the remainder of the evening.

The following morning, which was a fine one, I set

out on a stroll through the city. The "Granite City," as applied to Aberdeen, is no misnomer. Bridges, wharfs, docks, piers, lighthouses, streets, and monuments, are all of granite. In one street I observed a house built of sandstone—the contrast was very remarkable. It seemed soft and pulpy in comparison with its more durable neighbours all around. Granite columns are there crowned with granite capitals, carved and twisted to a degree that is perfectly marvellous to behold. There is, I was informed, a great trade done in granite tables, and other pieces of furniture, rings, toys, and trinkets. I could not have believed, from anything short of actual observation, that granite,—the obstinate, the stubborn, the brittle,—had allowed itself to become so tractable and ornamental. I have entertained more charitable opinions of granite ever since.

Marischal College, lately rebuilt of granite, is a fine edifice, occupying three sides of a quadrangle, and rising to the height of two lofty storeys, presenting unbroken ranges of mullioned windows. From the centre of the building springs a tower, which contains the principal entry and the staircase leading to the public rooms. The Common Hall, into which the janitor first conducted me, is a large, plain-looking room. "Plain enough," said my conductor, to whom I made the remark, "plain enough for such rough fellows as we have to do with." In the Library are some good portraits, busts, a great variety of coins, and nearly 20,000 volumes. "Have you got anything very curious or old to show me?" I asked of my guide. "Yes," he said, "here is an old Bible in manuscript of

the date of 1270." The volume is beautifully written on very fine vellum, but the modern who labelled it on the back has disfigured it sadly, by being not at all particular regarding his orthography. There are also some good portraits in the Hall, which are much more interesting to a visitor than those in the Library. The most prominent is that of George Keith, Earl Marischal, who founded the College in 1593. The family of Keith occupy a distinguished position in Scottish history. They seem to have originally resided in the south of Scotland, but going north with King Robert Bruce, one of them, Sir Robert, was presented with grants of several lands, and a royal seat in Aberdeenshire, which afterwards became their principal residence. George, fifth Earl, and founder of the University, was a man of high attainments and great influence. One of his contemporaries describes him as "left very wealthy, and esteemed honest, religious, and favoring the best parte,"—that is the Protestant section of the community.

The Museum of the College contains a fair collection of specimens illustrative of the mineralogy and geology of the district. The Natural History department is also pretty well represented. The janitor seemed sadly perplexed about the arrangement of some Chinese figures, which had been lately sent as a present to the Museum. He had, he assured me, tried twenty different ways to arrange them properly, but twenty times had signally failed. On examining the present, I found it was intended to represent a Chinese theatre. The figures on the boards were lying strewed about in the wildest confusion—the last act, evidently, of some

fearful tragedy, in which every one of the unhappy actors had borne a most murderous or suicidal part. I deeply regretted that my utter ignorance of Chinese theatricals rendered it impossible for me to give the least assistance to my downcast friend, in the way of restoring the fallen company to puppet-animation, or to their proper places in the drama which they had prematurely played out.

As I intended leaving Aberdeen in the afternoon, I made a hurried visit to the Old Town, and continued my walk as far as the Brig o' Don, or Balgownie, celebrated by Lord Byron in the tenth canto of Don Juan.

“As ‘auld lang syne’ brings Scotland, one and all,

Scotch plaids, Scotch snoods, the blue hills and clear streams,
The Dee, the Don, Balgownie's Brig's black wall,

All my boy-feelings, all my gentler dreams,
Of what I then dreamt cloth'd in their own pall,

Like Banquo's offspring ;—floating past me, seems
My childhood, in this childishness of mind:

I care not—'tis a glimpse of ‘Auld lang syne.’”

“The Brig o' Don,” writes the poet, “near the auld town of Aberdeen, with its one arch, and its deep, black salmon stream below, is in my memory as yesterday. I still remember, though perhaps I may misquote, the awful proverb which made me pause to cross it, and yet lean over it with a childish delight, being an only son, at least by the mother's side. The saying, as recollected by me, was this, but I have never heard nor seen it since I was nine years of age:—

‘Brig o' Balgownie, black's your wa'
Wi' a wife's ae son, and a mare's ae foal,
Doon ye shall fa'.’”

The “auld brig” looks as firm as ever, notwithstanding—

ing the old Rhymer's prediction. It would be an interesting employment for those who live in the house at the south end of it, to ascertain exactly, how often, say during a year, it is crossed by "a wife's ae son," or "a mare's ae foal." It is astonishing how often the tourist in Scotland meets in with Thomas the Rhymer; go where he will, Thomas starts up, where least expected, and repeats his "prophecies," which are usually couched in the most mysterious and wretched doggrel.

I left Aberdeen at six in the evening for Inverury. The country through which the line of railway passes is gentle and undulating. The fine alluvial soil on the banks of the Don is, as I was informed by a fellow-passenger, admirably adapted to the growing of oats; and he quoted the following couplet, which illustrates exceedingly well the opposite characters of the two Aberdeenshire rivers :—

"A rood o' Don's worth twa o' Dee,
Unless it be for fish or tree."

Inverury is a scattered, straggling place, with a strong partiality for banking establishments and shoemaking. The town is a long, slim street of a place, presenting very much the appearance, when seen from the hills above Port-Elphinstone, of a gigantic, attenuated Z. Before arriving at the station, I had observed from the train a curious earthen mound of a conical shape, and apparently fifty or sixty feet in height. This, as I afterwards learned, was the Bass of Inverury; and in making inquiries about its history or traditions, I stumbled once more on Thomas the Rhymer, who, ever ready with his prophecies, repeated the following lines :

“When Dee and Don run both in one,
And Tweed shall run in Tay,
The little river of Ury
Shall bear the Bass away.”

Regarding the history of the earthen mound, there are many conjectures. Some maintain that it is the grave of one of the ancient Scottish kings; others, that it formed one of a series of towers reaching from the coast to Kildrummy; while others affirm that it is the place where the plague was buried. It remains for the Society of Antiquaries to clear up the mystery. May the Rhymer's prophecy remain unfulfilled until such shall have been accomplished!

I stayed over the Sabbath in Inverury, and resumed my journey per first train on Monday morning. The day was so fine when I arrived at Keith, where the railway at present terminates, that I preferred walking on to being closely immured in the inside of the coach, which was waiting to convey the through passengers to Inverness by way of Elgin and Nairn. Sending my *impedimenta* on before me, I took the road, and, after a pleasant walk of nearly three-and-twenty miles, arrived in Elgin late in the afternoon.

No tourist should neglect a visit to the Elgin Museum; he will find much to instruct and interest him. It is certainly the best and most tastefully arranged of any that I have yet seen in Scotland, out of Edinburgh. The keeper, with whom I became on intimate terms immediately after inscribing my name in the Visitors' Book, was most anxious that I should see everything, and know as much of everything's history as possible. On referring to my note-book, I find several pages filled

with descriptions and legends of some of the more remarkable contents of the Museum. I do not remember of ever before learning so much in so short a time. The geology of Moray is particularly well represented by numerous very fine specimens of the rocks and fossils found in the shire and immediate neighbourhood. The keeper assured me that Agassiz, who, on one occasion, had honoured the Museum with a visit, pronounced some of the *ammonites* and *belemnites* to be the finest that he had ever seen in his travels. Another great man had, I found, been a frequent visitor there. "Hugh Miller often looked in," said the keeper. "He was just like a Hieland shepherd; his shoes were aye a' owre wi' dust and clay, and I could aye see the shank o' his *haimer* sticking oot o' his pocket."

The same evening, in the twilight, I went to visit the Cathedral ruins; it was, however, much too late for seeing them to any advantage. The old man in charge laboured hard to assure me that the ruins possess some fine and delicate carvings still; the utmost I could do, in these circumstances, was to implicitly believe every word he said. While we conversed, the darkness came down, and before I parted from him, the venerable pile was converted into a shapeless mass of masonry. "It's thought a fine place by strangers, Sir," said the old man. "Come again in the morning and see it, and I have no doubt you will think so too."

The morning, however, found me on the road to Forres. Before I had proceeded many miles, the weather changed, and being unprovided for a wet day, from having sent my baggage on before me to Inverness, I

had the misfortune to receive, long ere I reached Forres, the most complete and thorough wetting that I had experienced for many a day. Taking the coach on to Nairn, I saw, from its top, the famous "heath near Forres;" but as we rattled over it, the rain was such as to render me totally forgetful of all Shakespearean associations,—of everything about the wicked king and the weird sisters. I thought only of how I could get to Inverness fast enough. Reaching Nairn, after a most miserable drive, I took the train, which waited the arrival of passengers by the coach, and eventually arrived in the Highland capital, so cold and stiffened, that it was with the greatest difficulty I could drag myself and carpet-bag along the platform of the railway station.

CHAPTER SECOND.

LEAVE INVERNESS FOR CROMARTY—THE MORAY FIRTH
—THE ENTRANCE TO THE BAY OF CROMARTY—SEA-
SICKNESS CURED—CROMARTY—TRADITIONAL HISTORY
OF THE SHIRE—THE OLD COAST LINE—ENCROACH-
MENTS OF THE SEA—DONALD MILLER—NEW SITE
FOR THE TOWN—GEORGE ROSS—PRESENT STATE OF
CROMARTY.

EARLY the following morning I left Inverness for Cromarty in a small steamer, named, if I remember rightly, the *Samson*. It was evidently not much accustomed to passenger traffic; the vessel itself was nothing like so imposing as its name. It was with the greatest difficulty that the other two passengers and myself, who constituted the entire list of travellers that morning, could find anywhere on its well-stored deck a space sufficiently large to sit down upon. My fellow-passengers were a clergyman and his wife from Inverness, whose agreeable conversation lightened all the slight drawbacks to one's personal comfort on board the little *Samson*.

No one sailing sea-ward on the Moray Firth can fail to be struck with the remarkable contrast which its northern shore presents to that on the south. The latter is a long, low level line, with scarcely a rising ground to break the uniformity of the view; the eye is carried away over an immense tract of country before

it meets with the mountain ranges of the counties of Elgin, Banff, and Aberdeen. The northern shore, however, is totally opposite in its character. The view is quite shut out by a wall of lofty, precipitous cliffs, pierced with caverns overhanging the sea. As you approach the entrance to the Bay of Cromarty, the coast assumes a still bolder and more iron-bound appearance; and while gazing on the grandeur and magnificence of the scene, a sudden rent in the face of this precipitous granite wall suddenly attracts your attention; and on inquiry, you learn that the two gigantic headlands on either side of the entrance are the famous Sutors of Cromarty, standing like sentinels guarding the opening.

"The Bay of Cromarty," says Hugh Miller in his "Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland," "was deemed one of the finest in the world at a time when the world was very little known; and modern discovery has done nothing to lower its standing or character. We find it described by Buchanan, in very elegant Latin, as 'formed by the waters of the German Ocean, opening a way through the stupendous cliffs of the most lofty precipices, and expanding within into a spacious basin, affording certain refuge against every tempest.' The old poet could scarce have described it better had he sat on the loftiest pinnacle of the southern Sutor during a winter storm from the north-east, and seen vessel after vessel pressing towards the opening through spray and tempest, like the inhabitants of an invaded country, hurrying to the gateway of some impregnable fortress, their speed quickened by the wild shouts of the enemy, and pursued by the smoke of burning villages."

“Viewed from the Moray Firth in a clear morning of summer,” and every one who *has* viewed it will appreciate the graphic description given in the following words by the same pen:—“The entrance of the bay presents one of the most pleasing scenes I have ever seen. The foreground is occupied by a gigantic wall of brown precipices, beetling for many miles over the edge of the Firth, and crested by dark thickets of furze and pine. A multitude of shapeless crags lie scattered along the base, and we hear the noise of the waves breaking against them, and see the reflected gleam of the foam flashing at intervals into the darker recesses of the rock. The waters of the bay find entrance, as described by the historian, through a natural postern scooped out of the middle of this immense wall. The huge projection of cliff on either hand, with their alternate masses of light and shadow, remind us of the out-jets and buttresses of an ancient fortress; and the two Sutors, towering over the opening, of turrets built to command a gateway.”

Sailing through this natural gateway, which extends nearly two miles across, the waters of the Cromarty Bay are seen stretching far away inland, bordered by sloping promontories, hanging woods, towns, and villages. The whole view is shut in by an undulating line of blue mountains, swelling and rising as they retire until they terminate some twenty miles away in the cloud-capped Ben Nevis—

“Soaring snow-clad through its native sky,
In the wild pomp of mountain majesty.”

Immediately on entering the passage between the Sutors, a strong breeze from the land met us and con-

siderably impeded our progress. The Samson reeled, staggered, and pitched in a style which I had never seen equalled by any kind of craft whatever. Feelings began to creep over me which I never experienced before, and which were the very reverse of comfortable. I was too ill to look after my fellow-passengers, one of whom was considerably worse than I was. As I sat, in despair, holding on by some object,—I do not know what,—I felt something brush against my head, and the next moment saw it go overboard. The scared state of my scattered senses made me imagine that the lady passenger had been blown away from the side of her husband right into the sea. I started up, ill as I was, and looked in the direction where I supposed the lady had fallen over, but seeing or hearing nothing to justify my suspicions, I turned round, and was gratified to find her quite safe and on board still. The object which had brushed past me, was the cap of the cabin-boy, who bore his loss like a philosopher, by simply diving into the cabin, re-covering his head with a spare cap, and once more appearing on deck as if nothing had happened. This little incident quite cured me; the genius of sea-sickness fled; my uncomfortable sensations all vanished, and I bore the remainder of the passage like one accustomed to breezes and salt-water.

The town of Cromarty is finely situated on the southern shore of the bay on a low alluvial promontory, washed on two of its sides by the sea.* From the deck of the steamer, just when, after threading the passage between the Sutors, you obtain the first view of this now celebrated town, it presents a long, irre-

* See the accompanying Map.

gular line of houses running parallel with the shore. When you land, you find that it consists of one main street running, to speak generally, east and west, with a great many short ones branching off it at every kind of angle.

Cromartyshire is unlike every other county in Great Britain or Ireland. No one who looks at the map of Scotland can fail to observe that. Scattered up and down Ross-shire, it looks as if some of the giants in the olden time had been pelting each other with a few of the Western Islands, and had neglected to restore them to their proper places. There is another peculiarity about the old shire,—its history ascends into so remote an antiquity, as to be lost, like that of nations, in the age of fable. According to Sir Thomas Urquhart, an ingenious native of the district, Alypos, the forty-third in a direct line from Japhet, was the first to discover that part of Scotland now called Cromarty. This Alypos was a very extraordinary personage indeed, independent of his merits as a navigator. He was contemporary with Rehoboam, the fourth king of Israel, and, regarding him as constituting a link which divides into ancestors and descendants, was connected with some of the most famous people of every age of the world. The era of Alypos was a very important one in the history of Britain ; it was that in which the inhabitants first began to build cities, and to distinguish their several provinces by different names. To the same age is also assigned the first use of the term *Olbia*, as a name for the northern part of the island—a term which afterwards came to be pronounced *Albia*, or *Albyn* ; and the first application of the name *Sutors*,

from the Greek *σωτηρες*, *preservers*, to those lofty promontories which guard the entrance of the bay.

Alypos seems to have followed up his discovery of Cromarty by planting it with a colony of his countrymen, who appear to have been Greeks. One of their number, Nomaster, the son-in-law of Alcibiades, was recognised by the colonists as their legitimate prince, and he reigned over them till his death, when he was succeeded by his son Astorimon, a valiant and accomplished warrior. In his reign an immense body of Scythians, after voyaging along the coasts of Europe in search of a settlement, was induced to choose Scotland, and pouring in upon its western coasts, dispossessed the natives of some of their finest provinces. By degrees they penetrated northwards, and at length invaded the little territory of Astorimon. The Scythians, under Ethus their general, encamped upon an extensive moor, which now forms the upper boundary of the parish of Cromarty, and there Astorimon drew up his forces to oppose them. In the battle which ensued, the Scythians were routed with immense slaughter, and their leader slain. The scene of this encampment and engagement is now known by the name of the Maol-buoy Common,—a name familiar to every reader of Hugh Miller's autobiography in connection with the little incident recorded in the opening chapter. Such, according to Sir Thomas Urquhart, is the early traditional history of the shire. Let us now turn to the physical and political history of the town.

All around the shores of the Bay of Cromarty, there rises to the height of nearly a hundred feet over the sea-level a green sloping bank, in some places covered

with wood, in others laid out into gardens and fields. The same thing is seen in the Moray and Dornoch Firths, where the resembling ramparts of bank correspond in elevation and character; and, as in the Firth of Cromarty, the space between their bases and the shore is occupied by a strip of level country, which in some places encroaches on the sea in the form of low promontories, and is hollowed out in others to nearly the base of the escarpment. This continuous bank formed the old coast line in some remote era—an era so remote as to lie beyond the beginnings of our more authentic histories. “It is a well-established fact,” says Hugh Miller, “that for at least the last three hundred years the sea, instead of receding, has been gradually encroaching on the shores of the Bay of Cromarty; and that the place formerly occupied by the old burgh is now covered every tide by nearly two fathoms of water.” The last vestige of the ancient town disappeared many years ago, and it is only about fifty years since, he continues, “a series of violent storms from the hostile north-east, which came on at almost regular intervals for five successive winters, seemed to threaten the modern town of Cromarty with the fate of the ancient. The tides rose higher than tides had ever been known to rise before; and as the soil exposed to the action of the waves was gradually disappearing, instead of the gentle slope with which the land formerly merged into the beach, its boundaries were marked out by a dark abrupt line resembling a turf wall. Some of the people whose houses bordered on the sea looked exceedingly grave, and affirmed there was no danger whatever; those who lived higher up thought differ-

ently, and pitied their poor neighbours from the bottom of their hearts. The consternation was heightened too by a prophecy of Thomas the Rhymer, handed down for centuries, but little thought of before. It was predicted, it is said, by the old wizard, that Cromarty should be twice destroyed by the sea, and that fish should be caught in abundance on the Castle-hill—a rounded projection of the escarpment which rises behind the houses, and forms the ancient coast-line.”

There was no time to be lost; circumstances demanded energetic action on the part of the town's-folk against their common enemy the sea. Many of them, in consequence, were converted into builders and architects, and to work they set. At first the contest seemed nearly hopeless; week after week was spent in throwing up a single bulwark, and an assault of a few hours demolished the whole line. By skill and perseverance, however, they at length prevailed, and kept the sea at a respectable distance from their houses and gardens. Of the many who built and planned during this war, the most indefatigable, the most successful, and the most skilful, was one Donald Miller, who, upon the death of his father, succeeded to one of the most perilously-situated little properties within the three corners of Cromarty—the sea bounding it on the one side, and a small stream sweeping past it on the other.

Donald “had built a bulwark in the old, lumbering, Cromarty style of the last century, and confined the wanderings of the stream by two straight walls. Across the walls he had just thrown a wooden bridge, and crowned the bulwark with a parapet, when on came the first of the storms—a night of sleet and hurricane—

and, lo! in the morning the bulwark lay utterly overthrown, and the bridge, as if it had marched to its assistance, lay beside it, half-buried in sea-wrack. 'Ah,' exclaimed the neighbours, 'it would be well for us to be as sure of our summer's employment as Donald Miller, honest man!' Summer came; the bridge strided over the stream as before; the bulwark was built anew, and with such neatness and apparent strength that no bulwark on the beach could compare with it. Again came winter, and the second bulwark, with its proud parapet and rock-like strength, shared the fate of the first. Donald fairly took to his bed. He rose, however, with renewed vigour; and a third bulwark, more thoroughly finished than even the second, stretched ere the beginning of autumn between his property and the sea. Throughout the whole of that summer, from grey morning to grey evening, there might be seen on the shore of Cromarty a decent-looking elderly man, armed with lever and mattock, rolling stones, or raising them from their beds in the sand, or fixing them together in a sloping wall—toiling as never labourer toiled, and ever and anon, as a neighbour sauntered the way, straightening his weary back, and tendering the ready snuff-box. That decent-looking elderly man was Donald Miller. But his toil was all in vain. Again came winter and the storms; again had he betaken himself to his bed, for his third bulwark had gone the way of the two others. With a resolution truly indomitable, he rose yet again, and erected a fourth bulwark, which has now presented an unbroken front to the storms of twenty years.

“Though Donald had never studied mathematics

as taught in books or the schools, he was a profound mathematician notwithstanding. Experience had taught him the superiority of the sloping to the perpendicular wall in resisting the waves; and he set himself to discover that particular angle which, without being inconveniently low, resists them best. Every new bulwark was a new experiment made on principles which he had discovered in the long nights of winter, when, hanging over the fire, he converted the hearth-stone into a tablet, and, with a pencil of charcoal, scribbled it over with diagrams. But he could never get the sea to join issue with him by changing in the line of his angles; for, however deep he sunk his foundations, his insidious enemy contrived to get under them by washing away the beach, and then the whole wall tumbled into the cavity. Now, however, he had discovered a remedy. First, he laid a row of large flat stones on their edges, in the line of the foundation, and paved the whole of the beach below until it presented the appearance of a sloping street—taking care that his pavement, by running in a steeper angle than the shore, should, at its lower edge, lose itself in the sand. Then, from the flat stones which formed the upper boundary of the pavement, he built a ponderous wall, which, ascending in the proper angle, rose to the level of the garden; and a neat firm parapet surmounted the whole. Winter came, and the storms came; but though the waves broke against the bulwark with as little remorse as against the Sutors, not a stone moved out of its place. Donald had at length fairly triumphed over the sea.”

All traces of the ancient town of Cromarty, as has

been already mentioned, have long since disappeared. As house after house was yielding its place to the sea, the inhabitants were engaged in building for themselves new dwellings in the fields behind. A second town was thus formed, which, in its turn, has also nearly disappeared, though under the influence of causes materially different from those which swallowed up the first. "Shortly after the Union, the trade of the place, which prior to that event had been pretty considerable, fell into decay, and the town gradually dwindled in size and importance until about the year 1750, when it had sunk into an inconsiderable village. At this period, however, trade began to revive, and the town again to increase; and as the old site was deemed inconveniently distant from the harbour, it was changed for the present. The main street of this second town, which is still used as a road, and bears the name of the Old Causeway, is situated about two hundred yards to the east of the houses, and is now bounded by the fences of gardens and fields, with here and there an antique-looking, high-gabled domicile rising over it. A row of large trees, which have sprung up since the disappearance of the town, runs along one of the fences." The herring-fishery was the mainstay of Cromarty's prosperity as late as the reign of Queen Anne. In the summer of every year, immense shoals of this fish came running up the Moray Firth filling every bay and creek along the coast. There is a tradition that on one occasion, shortly after the Union, a shoal of many hundred barrels, pursued by a body of whales and porpoises, were stranded in a little bay, a few hundred

yards to the east of the town of Cromarty. The beach was covered with them to the depth of several feet, and salt and casks failed the packers when only an inconsiderable part of the shoal was cured. The remainder was carried away for manure by the neighbouring farmers, and so memorable is the circumstance that it is still spoken of as the "har'st of the herring-drove." After several years' successful fishing, the people of Cromarty learned, to their dismay, that the herrings had taken it into their heads to pay a visit somewhere else than the Moray and Cromarty Firths. Then came times of distress, varied at intervals by occasional revivals of trade through the exertions of some of the more influential of its inhabitants. Nothing was done, however, for the town on anything like a permanent footing, until the time when "George Ross, the Scotch agent, and worthy confidant of Lord Mansfield," returned from England to rank among the greatest capitalists and proprietors of his native county of Ross-shire. He found the country around him lying dead; there were no manufactories, no knowledge of agriculture, and worse than all, no consciousness that matters were ill, and, consequently, no desire of making them better. Although now an old man, considerably turned of sixty, he set himself to work a thorough reformation. Purchasing the whole estate of Cromarty, he commenced operations by establishing in the town an extensive manufactory of hempen cloth; building an ale brewery, "which at the time of its erection was by far the largest in the north of Scotland;" furnishing at his own expense an excellent harbour, setting on foot a trade in salted pork which eventually yielded

a revenue of "from about fifteen to twenty thousand pounds annually;" founding a nail and spade manufactory; providing houses for the poor; and erecting for the accommodation of the Highlanders who came thronging to the town to work on his lands and in the manufactories, a handsome Gaelic chapel. All these things did this energetic and benevolent man do, looking altogether to the good and advantage of others for his only remuneration and reward.

It was not without great exertion and extraordinary perseverance that George Ross effected the improvements just enumerated; it was long before he could get the people to understand that the advantages would lie on their side more than on his. They deemed the hempen manufactory unwholesome; they could not be persuaded to rear pigs for him, until he built a range of offices in an out-of-the-way nook of his lands, where he reared them for himself. But he seems to have been too well acquainted with human nature to expect much from their gratitude—though his patience, on one occasion at least, gave way.

"The town in the course of years," I quote from "The Scenes and Legends," "had so entirely marched to the west, that, as I have already had occasion to remark, the town's cross came at length to be fairly left behind, with a hawthorn hedge on the one side and a garden fence on the other; and when the agent had completed the house which was to serve as council room and prison to the place, the cross was taken down from its stand of more than two centuries, and placed in front of the new building. That people might the better remember the circumstance, there

was a showy procession got up ; healths were drunk beside the cross in the agent's best wine, and not a little of his crystal broken against it, and the evening terminated in a ball. It so happened, however, through some cross chance, that, though all the gentility of the place were to be invited, three young men, who deemed themselves as genteel as the best of their neighbours, were passed over—the foreman of the hempen manufactory had received no invitation, nor the clever superintendent of the nail-work, nor yet the spruce clerk of the brewery.”

These gentlemen considered themselves slighted, insulted ; and, accordingly, they meditated revenge. By some curious coincidence, it “happened that, during the very next night, the cross was taken down from its new pedestal, broken into three pieces, and carried still further to the west, to an open space, where four lanes met ; and there it was found in the morning—the pieces piled over each other, and surrounded by a profusion of broken ale-bottles.” The agent was, of course, very much annoyed at such a proceeding ; he even became angry,—angrier than those who knew him deemed him capable of becoming, and in the course of the day, sent the town-crier through the streets, proclaiming a reward of “ten pounds in hand” to any one who would give such information as might lead to the apprehension of the guilty party or parties. A few days after the occurrence, the agent, in the course of his walks, met with a poor, miserable-looking woman who was gathering a few withered sticks out of his hedges. In the course of a conversation with her, he learned as much about the affair of the cross as war-

ranted him in apprehending Jamie Banks, the nailer, who, through a singular lapse of memory, upon being examined, had forgotten every circumstance connected with the night in question. To give him due leisure for recollection, he was committed to jail. An acquaintance of his, one Rob Williamson, was shortly afterwards secured, and on learning this, Jamie Banks marvellously recovered his memory.

“He had finished working,” he said, “on the evening after the ball, and was just putting on his coat preparatory to leaving the shop, when the superintendent called him into his writing-room, where he found three persons sitting at a table half covered with bottles. Rob Williamson, the weaver, was one of them; the other two were the clerk of the brewery and the foreman of the hemp manufactory; and they were all arguing together on some point of divinity. The superintendent cleared a seat for him beside himself, and filled his glass thrice in succession, by way of making up for the time he had lost—nothing could be more untrue than that the superintendent was proud! They then all began to speak about morals and Mr Ross. The clerk was certain that, what with his harbour and his piggery, and his heathen temples, and his lace-women, he would not leave a rag of morality in the place; and Rob was quite as sure he was no friend to the gospel. He a builder of Gaelic kirks, forsooth! Had he not, yesterday, put up a Popish Dagon of a cross, and made the silly mason bodies worship it for the sake o’ a dram? And then, how common ale-drinking had become in the place since he had built his brewery—in his young days they drank naething but gin;—

and what would their grandfathers have said to a *whigmaleerie* of a ball! 'I sipped and listened,' continued Jamie, 'and thought the time couldna have been better spent at an elder's meeting in the kirk; and as the night wore later, the conversation became more edifying still, until, at length, all the bottles were emptied, when we sallied out in a body, to imitate the old reformers by breaking the cross.' 'We may suffer, Jamie, for what we have done,' said Rob to me as we parted for the night; 'but, remember, it was duty, Jamie—it was duty. We have been testifying wi' our hands, an' when the hour o' trial comes, we mauna be slow in testifying wi' our tongues too!' 'He wasna slack, the deceitfu' bodie!' continued Jamie, 'in trying to stop mine.'” And thus closed the evidence. The agent was no vindictive man; he dismissed his two superintendents and the clerk, to find for themselves a more indulgent master; but the services of Jamie Banks he still retained, and the first employment which he found for him after his release, was the fashioning of four iron bars for the repair of the cross.

The people of Cromarty, in process of time, found out the great value of the institutions which had been established by George Ross. The town began to rise in importance, and for many years it had a considerable trade in connection with the institutions already mentioned. Latterly, however, affairs have taken a different course, and Cromarty is fast sinking into a mere fishing village. Its peculiar situation has been already described, and to this very peculiarity it owes, no doubt, its present supineness. What was deemed a good situation last century, or the beginning of this, is

not considered so now, as far as Cromarty is concerned. Merchants who were in the habit of supplying the town with goods, found that it was a much safer way, as well as a much more expeditious one, to convey their wares by sea than by land to Cromarty, so long as the Highlander legislated for himself and his neighbour, on the good old principle so happily described by Wordsworth :—

“ For why? Because the good old rule
Sufficeth them, the simple plan,
That they should take who have the power,
And they should keep who can.”

So long as this principle prevailed in the Highlands, Cromarty had some chance of becoming the centre of the surrounding country's trade, owing to her advantageous position by the sea; but when the Highlander threw down his broadsword, and became amenable to the laws of the kingdom, another order of things very quickly prevailed. The isolated position of Cromarty is now its weakest point. There is no circumference of adjacent country from which to draw the materials for her trade and manufactures; and it is therefore not surprising that the towns of Dingwall and Invergordon—both the centres of a wide range of country—should be the seats of a commerce much more flourishing and extensive than that of Cromarty. I looked in vain for the results which might have been expected from the introduction of so many improvements by George Ross,—results so healthy and prosperous even so late as the time when Hugh Miller was a boy at school. A few vessels at anchor in the bay, presided over, for the time being, by H. M. S. Pembroke, one or

two more in the harbour, and a party of fishermen spreading their nets on the town-links, were the only signs of life or activity that presented themselves to me on the morning of my arrival.

CHAPTER THIRD.

A PROFFERED GUIDE—ARRANGEMENT MADE FOR AN EXCURSION—THE COTTAGE IN WHICH HUGH MILLER WAS BORN—SKETCH OF HIS FATHER'S LIFE AND CHARACTER—CATASTROPHE—VISIONS—THE FIRST GREAT GRIEF—STANZAS "IN MEMORIAM."

I HAD fondly imagined that in going to Cromarty, I would be beyond the reach, or, at all events, that I would be fortunate enough to escape from the toils of those intolerable nuisances to tourists while visiting any celebrated locality—persons who thrust themselves upon your attention, and endeavour to make you understand that it is absolutely necessary to hire them as guides, if you wish to *do* the locality anything like the thing. I had fully expected to meet with none of these human burs at the birth-place of Hugh Miller. During my progress northwards, I had secretly comforted myself with the hope that there surely I would be permitted to land free and unmolested, and that I would be left to the society of those books alone which I had brought with me to act the part of guide in all my wanderings among the rocks and shores of Cromarty. But I was miserably disappointed. Scarcely had I landed when one of the fishermen, referred to in the last chapter, approached and saluted me with that peculiar tug of the forelock, hitch of the trousers,

and general ground-swell roll which distinguish so unmistakeably a man of the sea from one of the solid land.

"Pleasant morning, Sir," said he. "May be, now, you are a stranger here, and perhaps would like to see the rocks and caves that Mr Miller wrote about. If you do, Sir, my boat and myself are at your service."

My reply was simply to the effect that the morning was indeed a fine one; that I was quite a stranger in Cromarty; and that the express purpose of the pilgrimage I had undertaken was to see the famous rocks and caves so graphically described in Mr Miller's books. I then informed him that my intention was to visit the celebrities of the place alone, but that if I found that to be impracticable, I should be glad to avail myself of the services which he had so kindly volunteered.

"Thank you, Sir, but you cannot go alone. You must not do that. It's not safe for a stranger, Sir."

After a lengthened, but quite friendly discussion, the fisherman so far prevailed as to induce me to listen to his argument on the necessity of having a properly qualified guide. He gave me to understand that he was just the sort of person I would require—he assured me that he knew the history of every rock for miles and miles along the shore—was perfectly familiar with the features of every one of them—that he had on more than one occasion escorted parties to the caves, and finally, that he had brought everybody safely back to land delighted with the excursion. Who could resist all this? I could not. The conclusion of the whole matter was, that should the weather prove agreeable the following morning, an excursion by sea round the Sutors, as far as the Eathie Burn, was determined on.

Meantime I set out in quest of private lodgings, which I soon procured to my entire satisfaction, and then spent the remainder of the day in strolling about the town and neighbourhood. The first object which naturally attracted my attention was the cottage in which Hugh Miller was born. It is situated in the older or eastern part of the town; a low, long, old-fashioned house, with its gable to the street, and the windows of its second storey half-buried in the eaves, built by old John Feddes, a buccaneering forefather. "There is the window," said an old man whom I had asked to point out the cottage to me, "There is the little window at which Mr Miller sat when he wrote 'The Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland.'"

Hugh Miller was descended from a long line of seafaring men, all good and gallant sailors, whose burial-place seems to have been for generations past, the bottom of the ocean. His father, when a boy, had been sent to a farm-house in the neighbourhood to be there brought up, in the hope of screening him from the hereditary fate of the family. The family death, however, was not to be avoided, for the boy, after a short stay, presented himself at his mother's door, and begged to be sent to sea as a cabin-boy. This wish was complied with; to sea he went, and after a life of many adventures and hardships in the service of his country, the sailor returned to his native town when not much turned of thirty, with money enough, hardly earned and carefully kept, to buy a fine large sloop, with which he engaged in the coasting trade. Fortune smiled upon the shipmaster; he married his cousin's daughter, and the old-fashioned house that had been

built with Spanish gold became his happy home. While he continued to thrive he purchased a site for a new house beside that of his buccaneering grandfather, and built for himself a dwelling in a much more modern style, and of a much more imposing appearance than had satisfied the ambition of the old gentleman just alluded to. The tide of affairs, however, soon turned, and the new house was destined never to be inhabited by its builder. Early in November, 1797, the shipmaster's sloop, which had lain for some days wind-bound in the harbour of Peterhead on its passage north, left its mooring and bore out to sea. The breeze which had lured the square-rigged sloop from her haven soon freshened into a gale, and the gale swelled into a hurricane, accompanied by a thick snow-storm. Another vessel which had left Peterhead with the sloop was fortunate enough to reach the Bay of Cromarty early the following morning, but its companion was nowhere to be seen. "Poor Miller!" exclaimed the master of the smack, "if he does not enter the Firth ere an hour, he will never enter it at all. Good sound vessel, and better sailor never stepped between stem and stern; but last night has, I fear, been too much for him. He should have been here long ere now." But the day wore away and no sloop came. Groups of anxious friends, relatives and town's-folk, looked out into the storm from the salient points of the old coast line, which rises immediately behind the town, and commands a wide view of the Firth. A second night fell, dark and tempestuous as the first,—still no sloop; and when the third came, with no tidings, the shipmaster and his crew were all given up for lost.

What a dreadful state of suspense for those at home in the old cottage! The master's wife, with her mother and sister, were absorbed in silent, stupifying sorrow, as still they watched and sat far into the night, eager to catch the faintest sound that might convey to their stricken hearts any intelligence of the ill-fated sloop. The town-clock had struck the hour of midnight, when a heavy foot was heard pacing along the now silent street. It passed, and then returned. After some ominous movements there succeeded a faltering knock that struck on the very hearts of those within. One of the inmates sprang up, and on undoing the bolt, shrieked out, as the door fell open—"Oh, Mistress, here is Jack Grant, the mate!" Jack, a tall and powerful seaman, but apparently in a state of utter exhaustion, staggered, rather than walked in, and flung himself into a chair. "Jack," exclaimed the mother of the master's wife, "where's my cousin?" "The master's safe and well," said Jack; "but the poor *Friendship* lies in *spales* on the bar of Findhorn." "God be praised!" ejaculated the old woman. "Let the gear go!"

By this reverse of fortune, the shipmaster had well nigh to begin the world anew. He was on the eve of selling his new house at a disadvantage, in order to provide the necessary sum for purchasing another vessel, when a friend interposed, and advanced him the money required. The new sloop, though not equal in size to the lost *Friendship*, was wholly built of oak, and a prime sailer to boot; and so he soon began to thrive as before, contenting himself meanwhile with the accommodation of the old domicile, and letting the new

one to a tenant. Some time after this, the shipmaster, who had now been a widower, married a second time, and on the 10th day of October, 1802, was born the first child of this marriage, Hugh Miller, in the long low house built by his great-grandfather, old John Feddes, the buccaneer.

The sight of the old cottage, under whose roof the famous geologist was born, conjured up before me all those intensely interesting associations now inseparably connected with it, and with which every reader of "My Schools and Schoolmasters" must be familiar. It was the happy home of the worthy shipmaster, who, on his return from long voyages, made it a still happier one by bringing with him those splendid toys which so captivated the heart of his little boy. The boy soon learned to distinguish for himself his father's sloop, when in the offing, by the two slim stripes of white which ran along her sides, and her two square topsails. Gentlemen with golden epaulets on their shoulders, and gold lace on their breasts, used to call at the shipmaster's cottage, and fill the boy's pockets with coppers; but, notwithstanding all this kindness on their part, they fain would have persuaded his father to go along with them, and help them to sail their great vessel. The master's previous experience, however, of the service, had been of a very disagreeable kind; and as his position, as at once master and owner of the vessel he sailed, was at least an independent one, he declined acting on the advice.

The boy's memory awoke very early—his recollections dating several months ere the completion of his third year. Would that these recollections had never been embittered with the melancholy events which, while

yet in his childhood, overshadowed the bright gleam which had hitherto rested upon that happy household! The mantle of sorrow was soon to fall that threw so dark a shadow over the future fortunes of Hugh Miller. His father, after collecting a supply of kelp for the Leith Glassworks, was returning home from the Hebrides, deeply laden, towards the end of October, 1807. He had threaded his way round Cape Wrath, and through the Pentland, and across the Moray Firths, when a severe gale compelled him to seek shelter in the harbour of Peterhead. From that port he wrote his last letter, and despatched it to his wife at Cromarty. The following day he sailed from Peterhead, but only to encounter a more terrible tempest than that which had caused the destruction of the *Friendship*. Miller's sloop, and every soul on board, were lost in the storm. The vessel had been last seen by a townsman on the previous evening, tacking about in the open sea, exhausting every nautical expedient to keep aloof from the shore. The master's skill and perseverance seemed successfully exerted, for, clearing a formidable headland that had lain on the lea for hours, and was mottled with broken ships and drowned men, the sloop was seen stretching out in a long tack into the open sea. "Miller's seamanship has saved him once more!" said the Cromarty skipper, as quitting his place of outlook, he returned to his cabin; but the night fell tempestuous and wild, and no vestige of the hapless sloop was ever after seen. Thus perished "one of the best sailors that ever sailed the Moray Firth."

No tidings of the catastrophe had reached Cromarty; and although the heavy ground-swell, occasioned by

the late tempest, came rolling in from the east, sending the surf high up the precipices of the Northern Sutor, there was no foreboding of the disaster in the master's dwelling. His wife had just received the Peterhead letter, and all was calm and serene in the happy household. But here let me quote, in Hugh Miller's own words, the remarkable incident which occurred on that memorable evening. "My mother," he says, "was sitting, on the evening after, beside the household fire, plying the cheerful needle, when the house door, which had been left unfastened, fell open, and I was despatched from her side to shut it. What follows must be regarded as simply the recollection, though a very vivid one, of a boy who had completed his fifth year only a month before. Day had not wholly disappeared, but it was fast posting on to night, and a grey haze spread a neutral tint of dimness over every more distant object, but left the nearer ones comparatively distinct, when I saw at the open door, within less than a yard of my breast, as plainly as ever I saw anything, a dissevered hand and arm stretched towards me. Hand and arm were apparently those of a female; they bore a livid and sodden appearance; and directly fronting me, where the body ought to have been, there was only blank, transparent space, through which I could see the dim forms of the objects beyond. I was fearfully startled, and ran shrieking to my mother, telling what I had seen; and the house-girl, whom she next sent to shut the door, apparently affected by my terror, also returned frightened, and said that she too had seen the woman's hand; which, however, did not seem to be the case. And finally, my mother going to

the door, saw nothing, though she appeared much impressed by the extremeness of my terror and the minuteness of my description. I communicate the story, as it lies fixed in my memory, without attempting to explain it. The supposed apparition may have been merely a momentary affection of the eye, of the nature described by Sir Walter Scott in his 'Demonology,' and Sir David Brewster in his 'Natural Magic.' But if so, the affection was one of which I experienced no after-return; and its coincidence, in the case, with the probable time of my father's death, seems at least curious."

This remarkable incident shows at what a very early age the mind of Hugh Miller became impressed with a sense of the supernatural. Child as he was, when the vision of the hand and the arm appeared to him, there was yet another which he had seen on a previous occasion, and when much younger. "One day," he says, "when playing all alone at the stair-foot—for the inmates of the house had gone out—something extraordinary had caught my eye on the landing-place above; and looking up, there stood John Feddes—for I somehow instinctively divined that it was no other than he—in the form of a large, tall, very old man, attired in a light-blue greatcoat. He seemed to be steadfastly regarding me with apparent complacency; but I was sadly frightened; and for years after, when passing through the dingy, ill-lighted room out of which I inferred he had come, I used to feel not at all sure that I might not hit against old John in the dark."

The death of his father was Hugh Miller's first great grief. "There followed," he says in speaking of this

domestic calamity, "a dreary season, on which I still look back in memory, as on a prospect which, sunshiny and sparkling for a time, has become suddenly enveloped in cloud and storm. I remember my mother's long fits of weeping, and the general gloom of the widowed household; and how, after she had sent my two little sisters to bed—for such had been the increase of the family—and her hands were set free for the evening, she used to sit up late at night engaged as a seamstress, in making pieces of dress for such of the neighbours as chose to employ her. . . . And so, with all my mother's industry, the household would have fared but ill, had it not been for the assistance lent her by her two brothers, industrious, hard-working men, who lived with their aged parents, and an unmarried sister, about a bow-shot away, and now not only advanced her money as she needed it, but also took her second child, the elder of my two sisters, a docile little girl of three years, to live with them. I remember I used to go disconsolately about the harbour at this season, to examine the vessels which had come in during the night; and that I oftener than once set my mother a-crying, by asking her why the shipmasters who, when my father was alive, used to stroke my head and slip half-pence into my pockets, never now took any notice of me, or gave me anything? . . . I used, too, to climb, day after day, a grassy protuberance of the old coast-line immediately behind my mother's house, that commands a wide reach of the Moray Firth, and to look wistfully out, long after every one else had ceased to hope, for the sloop with the two stripes of white and the two square topsails.

But months and years passed by, and the white stripes and the square topsails I never saw."

Who can tell the bitter anguish that must have torn the heart of the weary little watcher as once more he quitted his place of outlook, and returned to his widowed mother with no intelligence of him for whom they mourned! The dark clouds which now enveloped the once happy home of the boy, left their impress on his character. They imparted to it a seriousness, reserve, and fitful depression which never afterwards altogether wore off. In his opening manhood, Hugh Miller composed the following stanzas to the memory of his father. Although they show that he was not intended for a poet, they nevertheless express much that is striking, vigorous, and manly in their composition. The last two lines of the last stanza embody a beautiful thought:—

"Round Albyn's western shores, a lonely skiff
Is coasting slow;—the adverse winds detain.
And now she rounds secure the dreaded cliff,
Whose horrid ridge beats back the northern main;
And now the whirling Pentland roars in vain
Her stern beneath, for favouring breezes rise;
The green isles fade, whitens the watery plain,
O'er the vexed waves with meteor speed she flies,
Till Moray's distant hills o'er the blue waves arise.

"Who guides that vessel's wanderings o'er the wave?
A patient, hardy man, of thoughtful brow;
Serene and warm of heart, and wisely brave,
And sagely skilled, when gurdy breezes blow,
To press through angry waves the adventurous prow;
Age hath not quelled his strength, nor quenched desire
Of generous deed, nor chilled his bosom's glow;
Yet to a better world his hopes aspire.
Ah! this must sure be thee! All hail, my honoured Sire!

“Alas! thy latest voyage draws near a close,
For Death broods voiceless on the darkening sky;
Subsides the breeze; the unruffled winds repose;
The scene is peaceful all. Can Death be nigh,
When thus, mute and unarm'd, his vassals lie?
Mark ye that cloud! There toils the imprisoned gale;
E'en now it comes, with voice uplifted high;
Resound the shores, harsh screams the rending sail,
And roars th' amazed wave, and bursts the thunder peal!

“Three days the tempest raged; on Scotia's shore
Wreck piled on wreck, and corse o'er corse was thrown;
Her rugged cliffs were red with clotted gore;
Her dark caves echoed back th' expiring moan;
And luckless maidens mourned their lovers gone,
And friendless orphans cried in vain for bread;
And widowed mothers wandered forth alone:—
Restore, O wave, they cried—restore our dead!
And then the breast they bared, and beat th' unsheltered head.

“Of thee, my Sire, what mortal tongue can tell!
No friendly bay thy shattered barque received:
Ev'n when thy dust reposed in ocean cell,
Strange baseless tales of hope thy friends deceived,
Which oft they doubted sad, or gay believed.
At length, when deeper, darker wax'd the gloom,
Hopeless they grieved; but 'twas in vain they grieved.
If God be truth, 'tis sure no voice of doom
That bids the accepted soul its robes of joy assume.”

CHAPTER FOURTH.

THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL—THE OLD DAME—A DISCOVERY
—NEW LESSONS AND STUDIES—CRITICISM—THE FINAL
LEAVE-TAKING OF SCHOOL—HUGH MILLER'S REAL
SCHOOLS AND HIS TRUE TEACHERS—UNCLES JAMES
AND ALEXANDER—EARLIEST GEOLOGICAL DISCOVER-
IES.

NOT very far from the cottage in which Hugh Miller was born, stands the Grammar School of Cromarty, fronting the Bay. "The building," to quote the description given of it in "My Schools and School-masters," "in which we met was a low, long, straw-thatched cottage, open from gable to gable, with a mud floor below, and an unlathed roof above; and stretching along the naked rafters, which, when the master chanced to be absent for a few minutes, gave noble exercise in climbing, there used frequently to lie a helm or oar or boat-hook, or even a fore-sail—the spoil of some hapless peat-boat from the opposite side of the Firth." The school-house is now, however, much improved. The straw-thatched roof has made way for one of slate; the naked rafters along which, as I was informed by the present master who kindly invited me to enter, many an urchin used to climb to be out of reach when the hour of reckoning for some misdeed had arrived, are now concealed from view by a clean, white ceiling.

The school at the time of my visit was full of chil-

dren of different ages and at various degrees of advancement in learning. As I looked upon them all, I felt the whole scene to be a most deeply interesting one. There, probably, stood the very form on which the future geologist sat, as he recited story after story to his rapt and listening class-fellows. There were the very windows out of which he and his companions used to look as they criticised so unsparingly the build of every vessel that entered the Firth, or predicted the number of crans aboard each fishing-boat that returned in the morning after the toils of the night. There was, no doubt, the very desk at which his master used to sit when he addressed to him those quiet little speeches vouchsafed to no other pupil but himself, indicative of a certain literary ground common to both.

This literary ground appears to have been the only object during the whole period of Hugh Miller's attendance at school that possessed any interest at all for him. How little the schools which he attended had to do with his education, his autobiography abundantly testifies. He does not acknowledge mental growth to have been the result of attendance at any one of them. The old dame, under whose charge Hugh had been placed previous to his father's death, did as little for him as Mistress Elizabeth Delap did for Oliver Goldsmith. She did not even teach him his letters, for these he had learned for himself, not by slow tuition, nor even from a book, but from the pictures of jugs and glasses, bottles and loaves of bread painted on the sign-boards of the town which, combined with the letters forming the owners' names, had early excited his utmost admiration. The old lady taught him to read, it is true,

but it was in the regular gin-horse style; he knew nothing whatever about what he *was* reading—a page of Greek would have been to him equally intelligible. By the time he had reached his sixth year, he had groped his way, under her “awful wisdom,” as far as the highest form, where the Bible was the text-book. The process of acquiring learning was to the boy a very dark one; he had not the slightest idea what it all meant, or whither it tended, or, indeed, anything about it. This profound darkness, however, was but the prelude of a great and glorious light which was just about to break upon the mind of the little student. One day as he laboriously and mechanically spelt his way through the story of Joseph, the light broke, and all the thrilling incidents of that delightful story caught his mind and awoke it as with the first gush of life and enjoyment. “I actually found out for myself,” he says, “that the art of reading is the art of finding stories in books, and from that moment reading became one of the most delightful of my amusements.” No more darkness now. The boy longed for the dismissal of the school that he might retire to some corner where he might indulge in the luxury of another perusal of Joseph and his brethren. The other immortal Scripture stories followed, all about Samson and the Philistines, David and Goliath, Elijah, Elisha, and the beautiful parables of the New Testament. Then came the ever-famous tales of Jack the Giant Killer, Blue-Beard, Sinbad the Sailor, Beauty and the Beast, and Aladdin, or the Wonderful Lamp. From such elementary books as these last, he passed on while yet a child, unconscious of any break or line of division,

to works on which the learned are content to write commentaries and dissertations. He found these quite as nice children's books as any of the others that he had already perused. "Old Homer wrote admirably for little folk, especially in the *Odyssey*; a copy of which—in the only true translation extant—for, judging from its surpassing interest, and the wrath of critics, such I hold that of Pope to be—I found in the house of a neighbour. Next came the *Iliad*; not, however, in a complete copy, but represented by four of the six volumes of Bernard Lintot." He even tried his hand at criticism, and, like Burns, succeeded in detecting what was genius and what was mere fustian. "I saw, even at this immature period, that no writer could cast a javelin with half the force of Homer. The missiles went whizzing athwart his pages; and I could see the momentary gleam of the steel, ere it buried itself deep in brass and bull-hide." He next discovered a magnificent old edition of Bunyan's enchanting allegory, and, to complete the library of his childhood, there eventually followed books of voyages and travels, which when he had read, he wished himself big enough to be a sailor that he might go and see coral islands and burning mountains, and hunt wild beasts and fight battles.

This was a brilliant chapter in Hugh Miller's education, although altogether beyond the pale of the dame's school. Already was his mind becoming enriched with that poetry and imagination which threw over his own future writings the peculiar charm which invests them with all the interest of a work of fiction.

From the old dame's school, after a twelve-month's

nominal education, Hugh Miller was transferred to the Grammar School of Cromarty, which, in a certain way, did a great deal for him. The master, however, did not do much. Although an excellent scholar, he was scarcely the right man in the right place. The character of his government was exceedingly lenient, and the discipline of the school excessively mild. "There were none of us much looked after," writes his pupil; "and I soon learned to bring books of amusement to the school with me, which, amid the Babel confusion of the place, I contrived to read undetected." From reading, the boy took to telling stories, which became so popular among his class-fellows, that, having exhausted all his stock obtained through the medium of his youthful library, he set himself, in the extremity of the case, to try his ability at romancing. In this department he even proved more successful than in the tales at second-hand, and soon became the centre of a group of clustered heads, the owners of which enjoyed perfect immunity from the "tawse" of the worthy master, notwithstanding the pretty correct notion he had of what was going on. By simply peering over a book or a slate, the most exciting scenes could be witnessed by the boys from the school windows. Close at hand was an extensive slaughter-house, where from eighty to a hundred pigs used sometimes to die for the general good in a single day. This establishment afforded excellent opportunities for studying anatomy—opportunities which were not neglected. They became learned in naval architecture, for not a vessel could enter the Firth but its build was unsparingly criticised; they became skilful in predicting the number of crans aboard

the herring-boats from their depth in the water, as they passed into the harbour; and in their encounters with the peat-boats from Ross-shire, they received a training not unworthy of Spartans.

Such were some of the lessons learned in the Grammar School of Cromarty. It was from no incapacity on the part of the master that no other lessons were studied and given. We have his pupil's own testimony that if a boy really wished to learn, *he* certainly could teach him. "But then, on the other hand, the pupils who wished to do nothing—a description of individuals that comprised fully two-thirds of all the younger ones—were not required to do much more than they wished; and parents and guardians were loud in their complaints that he was no suitable schoolmaster for them; though the boys themselves usually thought him quite suitable enough."

The learned master was in the habit of advising the parents and guardians of those whom he considered his best and cleverest pupils to give them a classical education. Speaking to one of Hugh Miller's uncles, whom he happened to meet one day, upon the subject, he urged that Hugh should be put at once to Latin. Uncle James having consented, the future geologist was transferred from the English to the classical form, and in due time was introduced to the "Rudiments." The boy started fair, but after labouring with tolerable diligence for a day or two, he began miserably to flag and to long for his English reading once more, with its nice, amusing stories, and its picture-like descriptions. "The Rudiments was by far the dullest book I had ever seen. It embodied no thought that I could per-

ceive—it certainly contained no narrative—it was a perfect contrast to not only the ‘Life and Adventures of Sir William Wallace,’ but to even the voyages of Cook and Anson.” And so farewell to Latin. No one acquainted with the writings of Hugh Miller can fail to observe the frequency and aptness of his allusions to the classical writers of Greece and Rome. It might be supposed that he had taken again to his Rudiments and made himself master of the fine old languages. To a great extent he had done so—but at second hand only. It was by a studied familiarity with the best English translations that he succeeded in illustrating and beautifying his style with their reflected and imperishable lustre.

But although the master of the Grammar School failed in imparting to his pupil a knowledge of the Latin language, there was one important service which he rendered to him, and which ought not to be overlooked. At the general English lesson, the master was in the habit of addressing to Hugh those quiet little speeches and criticisms which have already been alluded to. A mere explanation of the meaning of the lesson was considered out of place altogether, for between him and his pupil, who was rather a favourite, there existed a certain literary ground on which the other boys of the class had not entered. Accordingly, the master preferred criticising the lesson to asking a few commonplace questions upon it. “That, sir,” he would say, after the class had perused a “Tatler” or “Spectator,” “That, sir, is a good paper: it’s an Addison;” or, “That’s one of Steele’s, sir.” Thus, while Hugh had the privilege of borrowing from the library of his

friend, poor Francie, the retired clerk and super-cargo, any of the British essayists, he enjoyed at the same time the advantage of having a few quiet little speeches on their contents by the master of the Grammar School. These were the days when class-books, used in schools, contained a fine selection of the best extracts of the best writers. In our times, school-books are made up of scientific details, which, in many instances, are thoroughly detested by children. And no wonder. To be condemned to read about the properties of Oxygen instead of the ever-entertaining story of Goldsmith's "Whang the Miller," and other instructive extracts, is to them quite as agreeable as the Latin Grammar was to Hugh Miller. It is absurd to think of rendering a lesson on the laws of matter and motion equally interesting with another on "Androcles and the Lion." Children cannot be made so eminently practical as to choose a scientific cramming in preference to some delightful story which, in the hands of a good teacher, interests all and has a moral for all. By all means let the more advanced classes in our schools be instructed in the elements of science; but we implore compilers and publishers of school-books to spare and protect the tender years of childhood from being frightened by such lessons as Hydrostatics and Pneumatics.

At the third school to which Hugh Miller was next placed his career was short, unsatisfactory, and unfortunate. The appointment of a new master after a long vacation was one not the most profitable for the pupils. He had certain peculiarities which earned for him a nickname—a misfortune which seldom or never befalls the truly superior man. Instead of setting him-

self to remedy the spelling and grammar of one of his pupils at least—the subject of these pages—whose proficiency in these branches was, it appears, very far from what Dr Johnson or William Lennie would have sanctioned, the new master prescribes as an exercise the following:—"Let us see," he said, "let us see; the dancing-school ball comes on here next week—bring me a poem on the dancing-school ball."

This, then, was Hugh Miller's *nominal* education. The Cromarty schools and schoolmasters did little for him. His course of reading, extensive as it was, was not what any of his masters had prescribed; the knowledge which he had already acquired was not what had been communicated to him by any of them. Since all the three teachers had so little to do with his education, it is very natural to inquire whether or not there had been anything on the boy's part that affords a sufficient explanation how it was that they all had such a very small share in the development of his mental faculties. We cannot absolve him from blame altogether, for he confesses to a sadly mis-spent boyhood. From all that we learn in his own graphic pages, where he details the events of his early life, he appears to have been a self-willed, but generous boy. Having been deprived at an early age of a father's control, he was, probably, too often left to work out his own will unchallenged, and some previous intimations prepare us for the final leave-taking of school which is thus related in his own words. "The class to which I now belonged read an English lesson every afternoon, and had its rounds of spelling; and in these last I acquitted myself but ill; partly from the circumstance

that I spelt only indifferently, but still more from the further circumstance that, retaining strongly fixed in my memory the broad Scotch pronunciation acquired at the dame's school, I had to carry on in my mind the double process of at once spelling the required word, and of translating the old sounds of the letters of which it was composed into the modern ones. Nor had I been taught to break the words into syllables; and so, when required one evening to spell the word '*awful*,' with much deliberation—for I had to translate, as I went on, the letters *a-w* and *u*—I spelt it word for word, without break or pause, as *a-w-f-u-l*. 'No,' said the master, '*a-w, aw, f-u-l, awful*; spell again.' This seemed preposterous spelling. It was sticking in an *a*, as I thought, into the middle of the word, where, I was sure, no *a* had a right to be; and so I spelt it as at first. The master recompensed my supposed contumacy with a sharp cut athwart the ears with his tawse; and again demanding the spelling of the word, I yet again spelt it as at first. But on receiving a second cut, I refused to spell it any more; and, determined on overcoming my obstinacy, he laid hold of me and attempted throwing me down. As wrestling, however, had been one of our favourite Marcus Cave exercises, and as few lads of my inches wrestled better than I, the master, though a tall and tolerably robust fellow, found the feat considerably more difficult than he could have supposed. We swayed from side to side of the school-room, now backwards, now forwards, and for a full minute it seemed to be rather a moot point on which side the victory was to incline. At length, however, I was tripped over a form; and as the master

had to deal with me, not as master usually deals with pupil, but as one combatant deals with another, whom he has to beat into submission, I was mauled in a way that filled me with aches and bruises for a full month thereafter. I greatly fear, that had I met the fellow on a lonely road five years subsequent to our encounter, when I had become strong enough to raise breast-high the great lifting stone of the Dropping Cave, he would have caught as sound a thrashing as ever he gave to little boy or girl in his life; but all I could do at this time was to take down my cap from off the pin, when the affair had ended, and march straight out of school. And thus terminated my school education."

This was a sad closing scene! The youthful actor in it, however, was really more unfortunate than guilty. Self-willed and determined as he was, the pedagogue might have got him to spell the *awful* word as requested, if he had only had the common sense to reason with such a boy, and to tell him *why* he wished the word spelt in such a manner. The whole school system under which Hugh Miller was unfortunately placed, was one totally inadequate to its requirements. It wanted sympathy with boyhood, and how could it possibly be anything else but a complete and miserable failure?

The boy, however, had not been idle all this time; his *real* education was going on, and progressing most favourably. We have seen what a very small modicum of learning he had received through the ordinary channels, from their utter want of interest and sympathy—save and except the Grammar School master's quiet

little speeches. His real schools were the rocks, the caves, and the sea-beat shores of Cromarty; his real schoolmasters were his two uncles, James and Alexander, who succeeded in doing what his professional teachers had failed in—giving *direction* to his studies and pursuits.

Allusion has already been made to uncles James and Alexander, in a former paragraph. After the death of the sailor, they deemed themselves called upon to take his place in the family now left fatherless. How faithfully they performed their duty in this respect, and in the work of instruction and discipline, their grateful nephew acknowledges in many ways. They were both remarkable men.

“James,” the elder uncle, “added to a clear head and much native sagacity, a singularly retentive memory, and great thirst of information. He was a harness-maker, and wrought for the farmers of an extensive district of country; and as he never engaged either journeyman or apprentice, but executed all his work with his own hands, his hours of labour—save that he indulged in a brief pause as the twilight came on, and took a mile’s walk or so—were usually protracted from six o’clock in the morning till ten at night. Such incessant occupation left him little time for reading; but he often found some one to read beside him during the day, and in the winter evenings his portable bench used to be brought from his shop at the other end of the dwelling, into the family sitting-room, and placed beside the circle round the hearth, where his brother Alexander, my younger uncle, whose occupation left his evenings free, would read aloud from some interest-

ing volume for the general benefit—placing himself always at the opposite side of the bench, so as to share in the light of the worker. Occasionally the family circle would be widened by the accession of from two to three intelligent neighbours, who would drop in to listen; and then the book, after a space, would be laid aside, in order that its contents might be discussed in conversation. In the summer months, Uncle James always spent some time in the country in looking after and keeping in repair the harness of the farmers for whom he wrought; and during his journeys and twilight walks on these occasions, there was not an old castle, or hill-fort, or ancient encampment, or antique ecclesiastical edifice, within twenty miles of the town, which he had not visited and examined over and over again. He was a keen local antiquary—knew a good deal about the architectural styles of the various ages, at a time when these subjects were little studied or known—and possessed more traditionary lore, picked up chiefly in his country journeys, than any man I ever knew. What he once heard he never forgot; and the knowledge which he had acquired he could communicate pleasingly and succinctly, in a style which, had he been a writer of books instead of merely a reader of them, would have had the merit of being clear and terse, and more laden with meaning than words. From his reputation for sagacity, his advice used to be much sought after by the neighbours in every little difficulty that came their way, and the counsel given was always shrewd and honest. I never knew a man more entirely just in his dealings than Uncle James, or who regarded every species of meanness with a more thorough con-

tempt. I soon learned to bring my story-books to his workshop, and became, in a small way, one of his *readers*—greatly more, however, as may be supposed, on my own account than his. My books were not yet of the kind which he would have chosen for himself; but he took an interest in *my* interest, and his explanations of all the hard words saved me the trouble of turning over a dictionary. And when tired of reading, I never failed to find rare delight in his anecdotes and old-world stories, many of which were not to be found in books, and all of which, without apparent effort on his part, he could render singularly amusing.” This was exactly the kind of instructor and the kind of education suited to the boy. He loved reading because it afforded him amusement, and instruction because it could be obtained so pleasantly. This superintendence of his reading bore fruit in after life far beyond what Uncle James had ever anticipated.

The other uncle, Alexander, or Sandy as he was familiarly called, was no less a remarkable man than his brother James. He had passed several years in the Royal Navy, and during the eventful period which intervened between the commencement of the war and the peace of 1802, there was little which his countrymen either suffered or achieved in which he had not a share. Such was his modesty of character, however, that he never could be prevailed upon to narrate any of his exploits; he would tell what he had *seen*, but not what he had *done*. He had been bred a cartwright, but finding on his return to his native town, after seven years’ service on board a man-of-war, that

it was already supplied with cartwrights enough for all the employment, he applied himself to the more humble business of a sawyer, and used often to pitch his saw-pit among the woods of Cromarty Hill. Here, instead of being at school, might be found the boy who, secure always in a share of Uncle Sandy's dinner, used to make excursions of discovery on every side, "now among the thicker tracts of wood, which bore among the town-boys, from the twilight gloom that ever rested in their recesses, the name of 'the dungeons;' and anon to the precipitous sea-shore with its wild cliffs and caverns." The Hill of Cromarty was to Hugh Miller, then, at once his true school and favourite play-ground. Uncle Sandy had a decided turn for natural history, and in returning from his work at the close of the day, used often to strike down the hill-side when "there was a tide in the water," and spend a quiet hour in the ebb. On these occasions his nephew, Hugh, delighted to accompany him, and from the instructions there and then received we see the future geologist reading his first lessons from the great book of nature lying spread out before him—a book the stony records of which he afterwards unfolded so clearly. In his autobiography he thus records his earliest geological discoveries:—

"The shores of Cromarty are strewed over with water-rolled fragments of the primary rocks, derived chiefly from the west during the ages of the boulder clay; and I soon learned to take a deep interest in sauntering over the various pebble-beds when shaken up by recent storms, and in learning to distinguish their numerous components. But I was sadly in want

of a vocabulary; and as, according to Cowper, 'the growth of what is excellent is slow,' it was not until long after that I bethought me of the obvious enough expedient of representing the various species of simple rocks by certain numerals, and the compound ones by the numerals representative of each separate component, ranged as in vulgar fractions, along a medial line, with the figures representative of the prevailing materials of the mass above, and those representative of the materials in less proportions below. Though, however, wholly deficient in the signs proper to represent what I knew, I soon acquired a considerable quickness of eye in distinguishing the various kinds of rock, and tolerably definite conceptions of the generic character of the porphyries, granites, gneisses, quartz-rocks, clay-slates, and mica-schists, which everywhere strewed the beach. In the rocks of mechanical origin I was at this time much less interested; but in individual, as in general history, mineralogy almost always precedes geology. I was fortunate enough to discover, one happy morning, among the lumber and debris of old John Feddes's dark room, an antique-fashioned hammer, which had belonged, my mother told me, to old John himself more than a hundred years before. It was an uncouth sort of implement, with a handle of strong black oak, and a short compact head, square on the one face and oblong on the other. And though it dealt rather an obtuse blow, the temper was excellent, and the haft firmly set; and I went about with it, breaking into all manner of stones, with great perseverance and success. I found, in a large-grained granite, a few sheets of beautiful black mica, that, when

split exceedingly thin, and pasted between slips of mica of the ordinary kind, made admirably coloured eye-glasses, that converted the landscapes around into richly-toned drawings in sepia; and numerous crystals of garnet embedded in mica-schist, that were, I was sure, identical with the stones set in a little gold brooch, the property of my mother. To this last surmise, however, some of the neighbours to whom I showed my prize demurred. The stones in my mother's brooch were precious stones they said, whereas what *I* had found was merely a 'stone upon the shore.' My friend the cabinet-maker went so far as to say that the specimen was but a mass of plum-pudding stone, and its dark-coloured enclosures simply the currants; but then, on the other hand, Uncle Sandy took my view of the matter; the stone was not plum-pudding stone, he said; he had often seen plum-pudding stone in England, and knew it to be a sort of rough conglomerate of various components; whereas my stone was composed of a finely-grained silvery substance, and the crystals which it contained were, he was sure, gems like those in the brooch, and, so far as he could judge, real garnets. This was a great decision; and much encouraged in consequence, I soon ascertained that garnets are by no means rare among the pebbles of the Cromarty shore." His uncles were to him the highest authority upon all scientific matters, and, consequently, he was perfectly satisfied with their decision on the other discoveries which he subsequently made. While Uncle James was thus cultivating in the boy's mind a love of solid knowledge by showing him its bright and attractive side, Uncle Sandy was laying

the foundation of his future scientific renown, by cherishing in him the habit of close and accurate observation, without which nothing important is ever discovered.

CHAPTER FIFTH.

SURF AND SPRAY—ASSURANCE AND CONSOLATION—
 “THE CLACH MALLOCH” AND ITS ASSOCIATIONS—A
 SCENE AT THE BASE OF THE SOUTHERN SUTOR—LE-
 GEND OF THE WELL—CAVES OF THE SUTORS—“THE
 AGE THEORY”—A CONVINCING AND CONCLUSIVE ILLUS-
 TRATION—THE DROPPING CAVE—“THE LOOK-OUT”—
 MARCUS CAVE—“MR MILLER’S SHELLY STONES.”

THE fisherman, whose acquaintance I had made shortly after my arrival in Cromarty, waited upon me early the following morning, and stated that it was his firm conviction we should have a very beautiful day and very favourable weather for our proposed excursion. On going down to the place of appointment, after breakfast, I found everything ready for setting out. The day was certainly a fine one, but so far as I could judge on maritime matters, it seemed to me *they* were far from being propitious. There was a heavy swell setting in from the Moray Firth, and as I looked in that direction, I could not help feeling, somehow or other, as I had felt the day before while on board the *Samson* in his most frolicsome moments. The surf was breaking over the myriads of rocks lying at the base of the Sutors, and throwing the spray as

“powdery snow
 That rises up like smoke,”

high up the face of the precipices all in wild and mag-

nificent confusion. The scene reminded me of Thomson's lines:—

“Lash'd into foam, the fierce conflicting brine
Seems o'er a thousand raging waves to *burn*.”

“Do we go farther out than yonder?” I asked the fisherman, pointing, at the same time, in the direction of the rocks.

“Oh, dear yes, Sir,” was the reply,—“a long way past yonder. We must go right round into the Moray Firth.”

I began to regret that I had not inserted the clause, “the sea being agreeable,” into the arrangements for the excursion. Despair must have been fast settling down upon my features, and my countenance must have been undergoing a process of elongation peculiar to the feeling, for my worthy friend begged me not to put such a long face on the matter, but cheer up and look as happy as possible. “All's right, man, all's right.” There was, he assured me, not the slightest danger to be apprehended. “A little surf on,” he continued, “a little, to be sure; but it's nothing, Sir,—nothing. There isn't a drop sea; it's quite quiet,—quite quiet, Sir.”

The manner in which he conveyed to me this assurance and this consolation, was, to say the least, highly amusing; and I felt it to be so, notwithstanding the great depth of misery into which I had been plunged. It reminded me of the way in which a groom labours to persuade a timid horseman that the restive animal before him, and on whose back he would *rather not* mount, is as quiet and gentle as a lamb.

I summoned courage enough at length to step into the boat, which was manned by a crew of four stout fellows, who each took an oar. Shipping my scientific apparatus, which consisted simply of a very extraordinary kind of hammer and a ship's glass,—both the property of my worthy landlady, who kindly made them over to me during the whole of my stay in Cromarty,—my friend took the helm, and we shoved off.

“Now, Sir,” said the helmsman, “if you take out your note-book, I will tell you the names of all the rocks which we pass.” I sincerely thanked him, and produced the book, though, from the pitching of the boat, I did not see very clearly how it was possible that I could make any notes.

“Yonder,” he continued, after we had skirted, for some time, a low, shingly beach dark with sea-weed, “yonder is the Clach Malloch, or the Cursed Stone, as they say the name of it means.” Looking in the direction which he pointed out, I saw an enormous boulder lying near the shore. At the mention, and the sight of this stone, associations crowded fast upon me. In connection with it, Uncle Sandy used to make many a sage observation to his nephew when, on their way home from the hill, they used to spend a quiet hour in the ebb together. “He used, too,” writes the nephew, in speaking of these early lessons, “to point out to me the effect of certain winds upon the tides. A strong, hasty gale from the east, if coincident with a spring-tide, sent up the waves high upon the beach, and cut away whole roods of the soil; but the gales that usually kept larger tides from falling during ebb were

prolonged gales from the west. A series of these, even when not very high, left not unfrequently from one to two feet water round the Clach Malloch, during stream-tides, that would otherwise have laid its bottom bare—a proof, he used to say, that the German Ocean, from its want of breadth, could not be heaped up against our coasts to the same extent, by the violence of a very powerful east wind, as the Atlantic by the force of a comparatively moderate westerly one. It is not improbable that the philosophy of the Drift Current, and of the apparently reactionary Gulf Stream, may be embodied in this simple remark.” The Clach Malloch is the “huge table-like boulder” referred to in Chapter VI. of “The Old Red Sandstone,” and the angular indentation of the coast in which it lies, is the place where Hugh Miller found,—though not what he was seeking for at the time,—so many strange fossils of the sandstone that he seemed entering upon, as he expressed it, a “*terra incognita* of wonders. Almost every fragment of clay, every splinter of sandstone, every limestone nodule, contained its organism—scales, spines, plates, bones, entire fish, . . . all together excited and astonished me; . . . and, were I to sum up all my happier hours, the hour would not be forgotten in which I sat down on a rounded boulder of granite by the edge of the sea, when the last bed was covered, and spread out on the beach before me the spoils of the morning.”

We at length reached the base of the Southern Sutor, and the scene which here presented itself was the grandest and most truly sublime of all the sea-views that I had ever witnessed. Frowning over the

sea were the high, dark, precipitous cliffs, far up the face of which the surf, at intervals, was throwing its showers of spray, where collecting, they descended in myriads of silver streamlets, to be instantly lost in the wild and unceasing commotion below. The great, green waves rushing furiously into the rocky caverns, and then frantically out again, all in foam, appeared as if venting their utmost wrath for their repulse upon the innumerable surf-worn fragments of rocks scattered along the base of the cliffs. Around these rocks the wild white foam was continually dashing, while the tangled *laminaria* which crowned their summits, were ever and anon seen throwing their long black stems hither and thither, as if imploring the wrathful waters to spare and pity them. But the deep sullen surge of the broken wave and the shrill scream of the sea-fowl were the only response to all their agonising entreaties.

The boatmen called my attention to a spring of clear fresh water which comes gushing out over the face of the precipice. This well has long been known by the name of Fiddler's Well, the waters of which are said to be medicinal. Hugh Miller, in his "Traditional History of Cromarty," has recorded the following beautiful legend of the spring, illustrative of the circumstance through which its virtues were first discovered, and to which it owes its name:—

"Two young men of the place, who were much attached to each other, were seized at nearly the same time by consumption. In one the progress of the disease was rapid—he died two short months after he was attacked by it; while the other, though wasted almost to a shadow, had yet strength enough left to

follow the corpse of his companion to the grave. The name of the survivor was Fiddler—a name still common among the sea-faring men of the town. On the evening of the interment he felt oppressed and unhappy; his imagination was haunted by a thousand feverish shapes of open graves with bones mouldering round their edges, and of coffins with the lids displaced; and after he had fallen asleep, the images, which were still the same, became more ghostly and horrible. Towards morning, however, they had all vanished; and he dreamed that he was walking alone by the sea-shore in a clear and beautiful day of summer. Suddenly, as he thought, some person stepped up behind, and whispered in his ear, in the voice of his deceased companion, ‘Go on, Willie; I shall meet you at *Stormy*.’ There is a rock in the neighbourhood of Fiddler’s Well, so called from the violence with which the sea beats against it, when the wind blows strongly from the east. On hearing the voice he turned round, and seeing no one, he went on, as he thought, to the place named, in the hope of meeting his friend, and sat down on a bank to wait his coming; but he waited long—lonely and dejected; and then remembering that he for whom he waited was dead, he burst into tears. At this moment a large field-bee came humming from the west, and began to fly round his head. He raised his hand to brush it away; it widened its circle, and then came humming into his ear as before. He raised his hand a second time, but the bee would not be scared off; it hummed ceaselessly round and round him, until at length, its murmurings seemed to be fashioned into words, articulated in the

voice of his deceased companion—‘Dig, Willie, and drink!’ it said; ‘Dig, Willie, and drink!’ He accordingly set himself to dig, and no sooner had he torn a sod out of the bank than a spring of clear water gushed from the hollow; and the bee taking a wider circle, and humming in a voice of triumph that seemed to emulate the sound of a distant trumpet, flew away. He looked after it, but as he looked, the images of his dreams began to mingle with those of the waking world; the scenery of the hill seemed obscured by a dark cloud, in the centre of which there glimmered a faint light; the rocks, the sea, the long declivity, faded into the cloud; and turning round he saw only a dark apartment, and the faint beams of morning shining in at a window. He rose, and after digging the well, drank of the water and recovered. And its virtues are still celebrated; for though the water be only simple water, it must be drunk in the morning, and as it gushes from the bank; and with pure air, exercise, and early rising for its auxiliaries, it continues to work cures.”

There are two lines of caves in the Sutors of Cromarty—“an ancient line, hollowed by the waves many centuries ago, when the sea stood in relation to the land from fifteen to thirty feet higher along our shores than it does now; and a modern line, which the surf is still engaged in scooping out.” As I sat in the stern of the little boat, which rose and fell with every lift of the waters, and looked upon the old caves, “in whose dark recesses the drops ever tinkle and the stony ceilings ever grow,” I recollected that this was the very scene which first impressed the mind of the author of

“The Testimony of the Rocks” with the fact of the vast antiquity of the earth. Everybody who has heard anything about Geology at all, knows that the “Age Theory” as it is called, is at present the most vexed and knotty question of the science. There is one class of persons who firmly believe that, about six thousand years ago, this earth on which we live was the scene of the chaotic confusion described in the first chapter of Genesis in these words:—“And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.” Another class assert that the scene of this chaotic confusion occurred thousands of ages ago, and that, consequently, this earth is of an inconceivably more remote antiquity than that of six thousand years. Hence, many theories have been propounded with the view of reconciling the apparent discrepancy between Genesis and Geology—between the two records, Mosaic and Geological. Of the various schemes thus propounded, that associated with the name of Dr Chalmers was at one time regarded as the most satisfactory. “It teaches, and teaches truly, that between the first act of creation, which evoked out of the previous nothing the *matter* of the heavens and earth, and the first act of the first day’s work recorded in Genesis, periods of vast duration may have intervened; but further, it insists that the days themselves were but natural days of twenty-four hours each; and that ere they began, the earth, though mayhap in the previous period a fair residence of life, had become void and formless, and the sun, moon, and stars, though mayhap they had before given light, had been, at least in relation to our planet, temporarily extinguished. In short, while it

teaches that the successive creations of the geologist may all have found ample room in the period preceding that creation to which man belongs, it teaches also that the record in Genesis bears reference to but the existing creation, and that there lay between it and the preceding ones a chaotic period of death and darkness." * This soon became the acknowledged, satisfactory scheme of reconciliation between the Mosaic and the Geological record, and it was also the one which Hugh Miller embraced and stood by, for a considerable time. He afterwards abandoned it, however, as one no longer adequate to meet the requirements and progress of geological discovery. In the course of his own investigations, he found it necessary to frame some other scheme which, as he says, "would permit me to assign to the earth a high antiquity, and to regard it as the scene of many successive creations. During the last nine years, however, I have spent a few weeks every autumn in exploring the later formations, and acquainting myself with their peculiar organisms." And he adds, "the conclusion at which I have been compelled to arrive is, that for many long ages ere man was ushered into being, not a few of his humbler contemporaries of the fields and of the woods, enjoyed life in their present haunts, and that for thousands of years anterior to even *their* appearance, many of the existing molluscs lived in our seas. The *day* during which the present creation came into being, and in which God, when he made the beast of the earth after his kind, and the cattle after *their* kind, at length terminated the work by moulding a creature in his own image, to

* "Testimony of the Rocks," pp. 117, 118.

whom he gave dominion over them all, was not a brief period of a few hours' duration, but extended over, mayhap, millenniums of centuries."

In the third lecture of "The Testimony of the Rocks," Mr Miller asks, "What are the facts, scientifically determined, which now demand a new scheme of reconciliation?" From among many facts, he selects two, which, in themselves, are most convincing and conclusive. The first of these is drawn from the old coast-line, the second from the unbroken succession of animal and vegetable life throughout the duration of the Tertiary period. As it would be quite out of place here to state all the arguments brought forward by Mr Miller in support of his scheme for reconciling the Word of God with the works of God, the present writer wishes only to draw the reader's attention to the first of the facts selected by him—one which possesses peculiar interest to visitors at Cromarty. The old coast-line is finely developed in the neighbourhood of the town, and is represented along the precipices of the Sutors by its line of deep caves raised so high that the sea never now enters. Regarding the age of the old coast-line, Mr Miller thus writes, "Though geologically recent, it lies far beyond the reach of any written record. It has been shown by Mr Smith of Jordanhill, one of our highest authorities on the subject, that the wall of Antoninus, erected by the Romans as a protection against the northern Caledonians, was made to terminate at the Firths of Forth and Clyde, with relation, not to the level of the old coast-line, but to that of the existing one. And so we must infer that, ere the year A.D. 140, (the year during which, accord-

ing to our antiquaries, the greater part of the wall was erected,) the old coast-line had attained to its present elevation over the sea." The caves, however, in the present coast-line represent its antiquity much more adequately than any historical notice. "Some of its caves, hollowed in hard rock in the line of faults and shifts by the attrition of the surf, are more than a hundred feet in depth; and it must have required many centuries to excavate tough trap or rigid gneiss to a depth so considerable, by a process so slow. And yet, however long the sea may have stood against the present coast-line, it must have stood for a considerably longer period against the ancient one. The latter presents generally marks of greater attrition than the modern line, and its wave-hollowed caves are of a depth considerably more profound. In determining, on an extensive tract of coast, the average profundity of both classes of caverns from a considerable number of each, I ascertained that the proportional average depth of the modern to the ancient is as two to three. For every two centuries, then, during which the waves have been scooping out the caves of the present coast-line, they must have been engaged for three centuries in scooping out those of the old one. But we know *historically*, that for at least twenty centuries the sea has been toiling in these modern caves; and who shall dare affirm that it has not been toiling in them for at least ten centuries more? But if the sea has stood for but even two thousand six hundred years against the present coast-line (and no geologist would dare fix his estimate lower) then must it have stood against the old line, ere it could have excavated caves one-third

deeper, three thousand nine hundred years. And both periods united (six thousand five hundred years) more than exhaust the Hebrew chronology. Yet what a mere beginning of geologic history does not the epoch of the old coast-line form? It is but a mere starting point from the recent period," or, as he says in another place, "the six thousand years of human history form but a portion of the geologic day that is passing over us; they do not extend into the *yesterday* of the globe, far less touch the myriads of ages spread out beyond."

Such is one of the most convincing and conclusive proofs that Mr Miller brings forward in support of his theory regarding the great antiquity of the globe. And no one who looks upon the magnificent and sublime scenery of the ocean caverns in the old coast-line at Cromarty can fail to regard that proof, not only as an apt illustration of the argument adduced, but one that is also firmly and fully established.

Before setting out on our excursion, it had been arranged that we should land at some of the caves. The surf, however, was running so heavily that it was deemed impracticable to do so; we had, therefore, to content ourselves with a look at them from the sea. The famous Dropping Cave was pointed out to me, the entrance of which seemed extremely narrow—a mere slit in the face of the rocky precipice, and one, apparently, difficult of access. It was to this cave that Hugh Miller, when a boy, accompanied his two uncles when they visited it, in order to procure some specimens of stalactite for Sir George Mackenzie of Coul. Having explored the Dropping Cave, they

entered another a little further to the east—one of the caves of the old coast-line, known as the Pigeon or Doocot Caves, which opens upon a piece of rocky beach, overhung by a rudely semicircular range of gloomy precipices. Here it was that Hugh and the little fellow who sat beside him at school on the Latin form, afterwards experienced the remarkable adventure, the incidents of which were described by the former in the shape of “some enormously bad verses,” but which, nevertheless, became so popular as to be handed about in manuscript and read at tea-parties by the *élite* of the town.

I found that the boatmen were quite well up to the mark so far as knowing the *names* of the rocks was concerned, but with most of the fine old legends connected with them, they were totally ignorant and unacquainted. They pointed out to me the “Chaplain’s Lair,” the “Look Out,” “the Caithness-Man’s Leap,” “the Auld Wife’s Meal Kist,” “Fiddler’s Well,” and many others—a mere list of names, however, without a shred of interest attached to any of them. “Mr Miller knew all about these stories, Sir,” said the helmsman to me, “but he cared more for the stones than the stories.”

The scenery of the “Look Out” is one of surpassing grandeur. “It is,” says the author of “The Scenes and Legends,” “one of those magnificent objects which fill the mind with emotions of the sublime and awful; and the effect is most imposing when we view it from below. The strata, strangely broken and contorted, rise almost vertically from the beach. Immense masses of a primary trap crop out along their bases, or wander over the face of the precipice in broad, irregular veins,

which contrast their deep olive green with the ferruginous brown of the mass. A whitened projection, which overhangs the sea, has been for untold ages the haunt of the cormorant and the sea-mew, the eagle builds higher up, and higher still, there is a broad, inaccessible ledge in a deep angle of the rock, on which a thicket of hip and sloe-thorn bushes and a few wild apple-trees have taken root, and which, from the latter circumstance, bears among the town's boys the name of the *apple-yardie*. The young imagination delights to dwell amidst the bosky recesses of this little spot, where human foot has never yet trodden, and where the crabs and the wild berries ripen and decay unplucked and untasted."

We had now rounded our way into the Moray Firth, and after sailing for some time to the south-west, came to anchor opposite Marcus' Cave,—once the especial, favourite retreat of Hugh Miller and his school companions, where, during their rock-excursions, they used to kindle fires at which they roasted shell-fish taken among the crags and boulders of the ebb below, and potatoes transferred from the fields on the hill above. Marcus' Cave, to quote the description given of it by the hero of these rock-excursions, "is deeply hollowed in the base of a steep ivy-mantled precipice of granitic gneiss, a full hundred feet in height, and bears on its smoothed sides and roof, and along its uneven bottom—fretted with pot-like cavities, with large, rounded pebbles in them,—unequivocal evidence that the excavating agent to which it owed its existence, had been the wild surf of this exposed shore. But for more than two thousand years, wave had never reached

it; the last general elevation of the land had raised it beyond the reach of the highest stream-tides; and when my gang and I took possession of its twilight recesses, its stony sides were crusted with mosses and liver-worts; and a crop of pale, attenuated, sickly-looking weeds, on which the sun had never looked in his strength, sprang thickly up over its floor." In this old cave Hugh Miller loved much to linger with his most intimate companion, Finlay,—“a gentle, tasteful boy, fond of poetry, and a writer of soft, simple verses in the old-fashioned pastoral vein,”—when the moon, at her full, rose out of the sea, and lighted up the wild precipices of that solitary shore. Often did their fires startle some benighted fisherman, and more than once did excise-cutters bear towards the coast, in the belief that Marcus' Cave was becoming a haunt of smugglers. The fuel of these fires was formed of strange materials —“as strange a mixture as ever yet bubbled in witches' cauldron—blood of pterodactyle and grease of ichthyosaur—eye of belemnite and hood of nautilus.” This extraordinary compound is found in the form of a dark, bituminous shale, fragments of which are cast ashore, during every heavy storm from the sea, from a sub-aqueous deposit of the Lias formation on this part of the coast.

Feeling much interested in this locality, I expressed a wish to the boatmen to be put ashore. As there is a good beach here, a landing is an easy matter compared with the caves of the southern Sutor, where the sea approaches close to the rocks. My wish was at once and cheerfully complied with—the only little difficulty in the way being how to get ashore without

wetting one's feet. This difficulty, however, was soon got over. Running the boat, stern first, as far up the sloping beach as possible, one of the men jumped out into the surf and directed me to drop upon his back whenever the wave retired. Obeying his instructions, I seized the proper moment, dropped, perched myself on his shoulders, and was carried safely ashore—the helmsman following, in order, as he informed me, to pick me up should I have fallen off. Scarcely had I touched *terra firma*, when I picked up a piece of the veritable dark, bituminous shale, with fragments of shells embedded in its substance. My two worthy friends were much interested in this discovery. He who had carried me ashore, hallooed to his companions in the boat, which was lying off a short distance, that the gentleman had actually found one of the same kind of stones that Mr Miller used to seek for; and taking a piece in his hand, he ran to the water's edge and held it up for their inspection. His enthusiasm seemed to be communicated to them: with difficulty—it required the helmsman to interfere—could they be prevented from jumping into the surf, leaving the boat to its fate, and joining in the search for "*Mr Miller's shelly stones*" as they termed the shale.

"My dear fellows," I said to the two beside me, "did you never see such stones before?"

"Yes hundreds of times," was the candid reply, "but we never saw any shells in them before,"—and they eagerly commenced a search for more. Had I been under engagement to supply the whole public museums of the kingdom with specimens of this ancient compound, I might have completed the terms of that

engagement in a very short time indeed, for, during my inspection of Marcus' Cave, my two enthusiastic guides had collected a quantity quite sufficient for such a purpose. Taking some of the best specimens with us, and a large piece of stalactite which I had detached from the roof of the cave by the aid of my landlady's curious hammer, we again embarked and continued our voyage south-westward.

CHAPTER SIXTH.

THE SCENERY OF "THE OLD RED SANDSTONE"—HUGH MILLER'S CHOICE OF A PROFESSION—THE QUARRY—HIS FIRST-FOUND FOSSIL—NEW SCENES OF WONDER—BECOMES A GEOLOGIST IN EARNEST—THE OLD RED SANDSTONE—HIS FIRST INTRODUCTION TO ITS FOSSILS—A SENSATION WHICH CANNOT BE DESCRIBED—A REJECTED PROPOSITION—THE SCHOOL FOR AN AMATEUR GEOLOGIST.

THE character of the coast, after leaving the vicinity of Marcus' Cave, suddenly alters. Instead of the bold, dizzy and abrupt granitic precipices continued from the southern Sutor, the shore is here "overhung by picturesque crags of yellow limestone, and roughened by so fantastic an arrangement of strata, that one might almost imagine the rib-like bands, which project from the beach, portions of the skeleton of some antediluvian monster." The northern coast of the Moray Firth is the continuation of the remarkable straight line which commences on the west of Scotland and runs in a north-easterly direction, until it terminates in the extreme point of Tarbetness. The north-eastern portion of this line runs, for nearly thirty miles, through an Old Red Sandstone district. It was in this district, so finely developed in the neighbourhood of Cromarty, that Hugh Miller first broke ground as a geologist. Why, yonder is the very sandstone quarry, under the lofty wall of cliffs overhanging the

shore, in which he passed some of his first days of toil—and of pleasure—as a mason's apprentice. Yonder is the Eathie Burn coming out of the gorge—a gorge so deep, dark and narrow that the poor little stream, when it emerges into light on the beach, seems quite bewildered, and runs to hide itself among the pebbles and behind the boulders. The rocky scenery described in that most delightful of all geological books, "The Old Red Sandstone,"—a work which, to an amateur geologist, "is worth a thousand didactic treatises,"—lies stretched out before me. I must land here!

The associations of Eathie and its neighbourhood recall the circumstances which led Hugh Miller to the choice of a profession. The turning-point in his life was reached immediately after the abrupt and unfortunate termination of his school career. Though his two uncles entreated him to devote himself anew to his education, and though they even volunteered to send him to College when sufficiently advanced, and to provide for him during the whole period of his attendance there, he yet could not be induced to listen to their proposals. This was a sad and a bitter disappointment to them. They had fully expected to see their nephew rising in some of the learned professions. Expostulation was all in vain. "I had no wish," he says, "and no peculiar fitness to be either lawyer or doctor; and as for the church, that was too serious a direction to look in for one's bread, unless one could honestly regard one's self as called to the church's proper work; and I could not." There was, therefore, nothing before him but the stern battle

of life ; no prospect but the necessity of ever toiling on from morning till night for his daily food and homely raiment. Gladly would he have avoided the necessity, but there was no escape, and so Hugh Miller determined to be a mason. It is interesting to trace the motive which induced him to make this decision. "I remembered," he says, "my cousin George's long winter holidays and how delightfully he employed them ; and by making choice of cousin George's profession, I trusted to find, like him, large compensation, in the amusements of one-half the year, for the toils of the other half. Labour shall not wield over me, I said, a rod entirely black, but a rod like one of Jacob's peeled wands, chequered white and black alternately." It was something more, however, than mere amusement that he looked forward to. Even at this period he seems to have possessed "that proper estimate of his own powers which is ever the best foundation for the settlement of the all-important question as to choosing a profession for life." Notwithstanding the antecedents of a sadly mis-spent boyhood, which he deeply regretted, he dared to believe that literature and natural science were, after all, to be his proper vocation. With this belief, he resolved that much of his leisure time should be given to studying the best English authors and to careful observation. This resolution was faithfully adhered to, and to it must it be ascribed that wonderful acquaintance with the standard literature of his country, which, in after years, he evinced in his own writings. His two uncles at length consented that he should make trial of a life of manual labour, and

to a third uncle, who was a mason, Hugh Miller was bound apprentice for three years. Getting a suit of moleskin clothes, and a pair of heavy hob-nailed shoes, he waited only for the breaking up of the winter frosts to commence work in the quarries of Cromarty.

The quarry in which he began his new career is situated on the southern shore of the Cromarty Firth, but it was soon left for another which had been recently opened out in the Old Red Sandstone on the northern shore of the Moray Firth. "I soon found," he says in the opening chapter of "The Old Red Sandstone," "I was to be no loser by the change. Not the united labour of a thousand men for more than a thousand years, could have furnished a better section of the geology of the district than this range of cliffs. It may be regarded as a sort of chance dissection on the earth's crust. We see in one place the primary rock, with its veins of granite and quartz, its dizzy precipices of gneiss and its huge masses of hornblend; we find the secondary rock in another, with its beds of sandstone and shale, its spars, its clays, and its nodular limestones. We discover the still little-known, but highly-interesting fossils of the Old Red Sandstone in one deposition, we find the beautifully preserved shells and lignites of the Lias in another. There are the remains of two several creations at once before us. The shore, too, is heaped with rolled fragments of almost every variety of rock,—basalts, iron-stones, hyperstones, porphyrites, bituminous shales and micaceous schists. In short, the young geologist, had he all Europe before him, could hardly choose for himself a better field."

This, then, was the new school which Hugh Miller entered, and the one in which he resolved to be a more diligent scholar than he had been while in those of his native town. In this school he was greatly to distinguish himself, and to graduate with high honours.

It was in an outlier of the Lias which, like the one at Marcus' Cave already referred to, strewns the beach with its fragments after every heavy storm from the sea, that Hugh Miller found his first fossil. "In the course of the first day's employment," he says, describing his discovery, "I picked up a nodular mass of blue limestone, and laid it open by a stroke of the hammer. Wonderful to relate, it contained inside a beautifully finished piece of sculpture,—one of the volutes, apparently, of an Ionic capital; and not the far-famed walnut of the fairy tale, had I broken the shell and found the little dog lying within, could have surprised me more. Was there such another curiosity in the whole world?" During his stay at the quarry he broke open many a similar nodule, in most of which he discovered some organism of the ancient world—scales of fishes, groups of shells, bits of decayed wood, and fragments of fern. Happening to show his specimens to his brother-workmen at the dinner hour, he was told by one of them that there were yet stranger things than these to be found at a part of the shore about two miles farther west,—curiously-shaped stones like the heads of boarding pikes, and called by the country-people thunder-bolts. Making use of a half-holiday, he visited the tract of shore indicated by his informant, and there he found a richer scene of wonder than he could have fancied even in his dreams,—a Liassic

deposit, not buried beneath the waves as at Marcus' Cave, or opposite the quarry, but exposed for a considerable way along the shore, leaning against the granitic gneiss of the hill of Eathie, and amazingly rich in its fossils. In the following graphic and expressive words his new discovery is thus narrated: "What first attracted my notice was a detached group of low-lying skerries, wholly different in form and colour from the sandstone cliffs above, or the primary rocks a little farther to the west. I found them composed of thin strata of limestone, alternating with thicker beds of a black, slaty substance, which, as I ascertained in the course of the evening, burns with a powerful flame and emits a strong, bituminous odour. The layers into which the beds readily separate are hardly an eighth part of an inch in thickness, and yet on every layer there are the impressions of thousands and tens of thousands of the various fossils peculiar to the Lias. We may turn over these wonderful leaves one after one, like the pages of a herbarium, and find the pictorial records of a former creation in every page. Scallops, and gryphites, and ammonites of almost every variety peculiar to the formation, and at least some eight or ten varieties of belemnite; twigs of wood, leaves of plants, cones of an extinct species of pine, bits of charcoal, and the scales of fishes; and, as if to render their pictorial appearance more striking, though the leaves of this interesting volume are of a deep black, most of the impressions are of a chalky whiteness. I was lost in admiration and astonishment, and found my very imagination paralysed by an assemblage of wonders that seemed to outrival, in the fantastic and the ex-

travagant, even its wildest conceptions. I passed on from ledge to ledge, like the traveller of the tale through the city of statues, and at length found one of the supposed *aërolites* I had come in quest of, firmly embedded in a mass of shale. But I had skill enough to determine that it was other than what it had been deemed. A very near relative, who had been a sailor in his time, on almost every ocean, and had visited almost every quarter of the globe, had brought home one of these meteoric stones with him from the coast of Java. It was of a cylindrical shape and vitreous texture, and it seemed to have parted in the middle when in a half-molten state, and to have united again, somewhat awry, ere it had cooled enough to have lost the adhesive quality. But there was nothing organic in its structure, whereas the stone I had now found was organised very curiously indeed. It was of a conical form and filamentary texture, the filaments radiating in straight lines from the centre to the circumference. Finely marked veins like white threads ran transversely through these in its upper half to the point, while the space below was occupied by an internal cone, formed of plates that lay parallel to the base, and which, like watch-glasses, were concave on the under side and convex on the upper. I learned in time to call this stone a *belemnite*, and became acquainted with enough of its history to know that it once formed part of a variety of cuttle-fish long since extinct."

With such an interesting and inviting field before him, and trained as he had been to habits of such close and accurate observation by his two uncles, can there

be any wonder that Hugh Miller became a geologist? The intense love of nature which distinguished him even in boyhood, had been the mainspring of all the excursions to the rocks and caves of his native shores with a few chosen companions. While gathering fragments of the dark, bituminous shale which strewed the beach at Marcus' Cave for fuel to their fires, he seemed sometimes to be on the eve of a discovery, but the mysterious scrolls and volutes only raised a temporary wonder in his mind. It was not until he had become acquainted with the organisms of the ancient world which his hammer revealed at the hill of Eathie, that direction and aim were given to his curiosity. All his former experience among the rocks had resembled the progress of his education at the Dame's school, up to the time when he made the discovery that reading means no other thing than the art of finding stories in books. The incidents at Eathie produced a corresponding result. From being a mere child that had sought amusement in looking over the pictures of the stony volume of nature, he henceforth became a sober and an earnest student desirous of knowing and reading it as a book.

The extreme beauty of the fossils which Hugh Miller found in the Lias so entranced him, that for a long time his attention was confined to this group alone. It was not until nearly ten years afterwards that he commenced those investigations in the Old Red Sandstone which have ever since been so inseparably associated with his name. At no very distant date the Old Red was a system so little known that there were some geologists of no mean standing who even disputed

its very existence, and considered it remarkably barren of fossils. What Dr Livingstone is doing for Africa, Hugh Miller did for the Old Red Sandstone. "This hitherto neglected system," he says, "yields in importance to none of the others, whether we take into account its amazing depth, the great extent to which it is developed both at home and abroad, the interesting links which it furnishes in the zoological scale, or the vast periods of time which it represents. There are localities in which the depth of the Old Red Sandstone fully equals the elevation of Mount Etna over the level of the sea, and in which it contains three distinct groups of organic remains, the one rising in beautiful progression over the other."

It was while prosecuting his researches amid the deposits of the Lias that Hugh Miller was introduced, somewhat accidentally, to the Old Red Sandstone. Trying to discover the extent of the Lias in the neighbourhood of Cromarty, and endeavouring to realise its original place and position ere the disturbing agency of the granite had upcast it to the light, he set out on an exploratory excursion one fine morning in August, 1830. It occurs in patches on the Moray Firth side of the southern Sutor, and he resolved on carefully exploring the Cromarty Firth, in the hope of detecting the Lias on that side too. "I began my search," he says, "at the granitic gneiss of the hill, and proceeding westwards, passed in succession, in the ascending order, over the uptilted beds of the lower Old Red Sandstone, from the great conglomerate base of the system, till I reached the middle member of the deposit, which consists, in this locality, of alternate beds of limestone,

sandstone, and stratified clay, and which we find represented in Caithness by the extensively developed flagstones. And then, the rock disappearing, I passed over a pebbly beach mottled with boulders; and in a little bay not half-a-mile from the town, I again found the rock laid bare." The little bay here referred to, has been noticed in the preceding chapter in connection with the associations of the huge boulder upon which the new-found fossils were displayed. These fossils were something altogether new to the young geologist; not a plate, spine, or scale could he detect identical with the ichthyic remains of the Lias. He had evidently got amongst those of an incalculably more ancient creation. He had, in fact, lighted upon a deposit of the Old Red Sandstone—a patch scarcely more than forty yards square, but so abundantly rich in fossils, that it not only supplied him with specimens at almost every visit for ten years together, but even geological tourists, and others who explored the place, for ten years more.

This was Hugh Miller's introduction to the fossil fishes of the Old Red Sandstone. "I was," he says, "for some time greatly puzzled in my attempts to restore these ancient fishes, by the peculiarities of their organisation. It was in vain I examined every species of fish caught by the fishermen of the place, from the dog-fish and the skate to the herring and the mackerel. I could find in our recent fishes no such scales of enamelled bone as those which had covered the *Dipterians* and the *Celacanth*s, and no such plate-encased animals as the various species of *Cocosteus* or *Pterichthys*. . . . It seemed somewhat strange, too, that the geologists who occasionally came my way—some of

them men of eminence—seemed to know even less about my old red fishes, and their peculiarities of structure, than I did myself. I had represented the various species of the deposit simply by numerals, which not a few of the specimens of my collection still retain on their faded labels; and waited on until some one should come the way learned enough to substitute for my provisional figures words by which to designate them; but the necessary learning seemed wanting, and I at length came to find that I had got into a *terra incognita* in the geological field, the greater portion of whose organisms were still unconnected with human language. They had no representatives among the vocables.” Nobody came that way to help him, nor could he find anything at present existing which might assist him in his oft-repeated attempts at restoration. Slowly but perseveringly he toiled on, until at length, after many an abortive effort, the creatures rose up before him in their “strange, unwonted proportions, as they had lived, untold ages before, in the primæval seas.” Years after these discoveries, when editor of *The Witness*, he availed himself of its columns to publish his geological investigations in the Old Red Sandstone, and to give a description of its wonderful fossils. At a meeting of the British Association, held at Glasgow in 1840, Sir Roderick Murchison, “the Silurian King,” hailed the accession to their science of such a writer, and it was on this occasion that Agassiz, “the Neptune of modern zoology,” who was present, proposed to associate the name of Hugh Miller with that of one of the fossil fishes found in the sandstone—the *Pterichthys Milleri*.

I found lying on the shore at Eathie many nodular masses of blue limestone, and on laying them open with my hammer, I found that all of them enclosed some organism of the ancient world. How the heart of an amateur geologist does leap up at finding a fossil! This, no doubt, is the proper place to describe the sensation—that is, supposing it were possible to do so, which it really is not. All utterance is denied you at such a critical moment; “description cannot suit itself in words.” I sincerely wish, however, that I could convey to the reader anything like a description of the intense excitement which was manifested by my friend the helmsman when he picked up what appeared to be to him one of the most wonderful things he had ever handled. He came running toward me holding aloft a large stone, shouting at the same time at the top of his voice, “Stranger still! the queerest stone that ever was seen!” On examining it, I found it to be the bed wherein a very large *ammonite* had lain; the fossil itself was gone, leaving only the mould or cast. As I deemed it of no value, I did not include it among my other specimens, but laid it aside. I was surely committing a grievous blunder, the finder of the stone evidently thought. “Not take such a stone as that, Sir!” said he, in perfect amazement. “Not very long ago the master of a Danish vessel, anchored at Cromarty, came round here to seek for these curious stones. He got one just like this, and thought so much of it, that, as he remarked to those with him, had he been in his own country, he might have got any money for it.” My attempts to convince the fisherman that the stone was curious only so far in its having once contained

a greater curiosity, were all unsuccessful and unavailing. I saw that were I still to refuse to place it among the other specimens, I should do nothing less than almost break the poor fellow's heart. I at length consented, and was taken into favour once more; the stone, however, was ultimately made over to the worthy woman with whom I lodged while in Cromarty.

I felt that the locality, in the midst of all those interesting associations already mentioned, was one in which I should like to spend an hour or two alone, to muse over what I had read of its geology and natural history in the opening and other chapters of "The Old Red Sandstone." I therefore proposed to the boatmen that they should return to Cromarty by sea as they had come, while I would endeavour to find my way to the same destination by an overland route, taking in my way the picturesque dell of the Eathie Burn. With a smile on his face, which I understood quite well, the helmsman remarked that probably the Cromarty surf had frightened me, as I wished to return another way. I had considerable difficulty in persuading him to the contrary—that it was from no feeling of fear or danger that I thus wished to alter slightly the programme of the excursion.

"But what will the good folk of Cromarty say when they see us return without the gentleman we took away with us?" he inquired quite seriously.

This was a consequence upon which I had not calculated, and so felt considerably at a loss how to answer his question. I pleaded that as my stay at Cromarty was very limited, I might probably not have many opportunities of re-visiting the glen of the Eathie, and

that, all things considered, it might be well to do so now. All the fishermen, however, advised me not to go, consequently I was decidedly in the minority. Eventually I gave in, though not without resolving that I would devote another day or more, if possible, to such an interesting locality, now that I knew the way to it.

Gathering up our specimens, we once more embarked, and after a very hard pull homewards, for the wind was right ahead, arrived safely at Cromarty late in the afternoon. No excursion had ever been to me anything like so interesting, and certainly none had ever proved half so profitable or instructive. In the subsequent visits which I made to Eathie, I learned as much of practical geology as illustrated, and that most strikingly, all that I had ever read of the science in books. With abundance of time at one's disposal, and with the "Old Red Sandstone" for a hand-book, I know not, on a fine summer day, a more delightful retreat than the romantic glen of the Eathie Burn. It is a place for the amateur geologist absolutely to revel in, to look at, and to learn practically what such things as faults in strata, granitic disturbances, precipices of conglomerate, false stratification, denuding agencies, trap rocks, ichthyolite beds and sandstone bars really are.

CHAPTER SEVENTH.

THE SYMPATHY OF INANIMATE NATURE—THE GAELIC CHAPEL—HUGH MILLER'S RELIGIOUS TRAINING—WALLACE AND BRUCE, KNOX AND MELVILLE—AN ECCLESIASTICAL DISPUTE—CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH INDUCED HUGH MILLER TO BECOME EDITOR OF "THE WITNESS"—HIS PECULIAR MISSION—FAREWELL TO CROMARTY.

A SERIES of excursions and rambles around Cromarty during a stay of nearly a week there, rendered me pretty familiar with the scenery of the district described in "My Schools and Schoolmasters," "The Scenes and Legends," and "The Old Red Sandstone." On every occasion, except the excursion to Eathie by sea with the fishermen, these books were my only guides and companions. Nor did I require any other. I learned from them how true to nature all their rich and beautiful descriptions of the surrounding scenery are. While at Cromarty I often experienced the feeling which every one must have experienced when visiting the birth-place of any remarkable man. Everything around seems charged with associations and memorials of him whose noble deeds or classic writings have handed the place over to immortality. You almost feel disappointed that its inhabitants can have the heart to go on as usual with their daily avocations; you would scarcely be surprised to see all business at a stand-still for a

while. You wonder how it is that they can possibly speak upon any other subject than the one which so wholly engrosses your own attention. This feeling may be compared to that which is experienced by one who, on returning home after a long absence in foreign lands, finds that a beloved friend or intimate companion has been removed by death. Every surrounding object puts him in mind of the departed; the country walks, the shady lanes, the river side, or the sea-shore, all seem to speak of him who used so often to linger there, and who loved their retreats so well. *They* are the true sympathisers with the mourning friend; *their* silent, speechless company is even more congenial than that of his own kind. Scott, in the following well-known lines, thus beautifully expresses this sympathy of inanimate nature:—

“Call it not vain—they do not err
Who say, that when the Poet dies,
Mute Nature mourns her worshipper,
And celebrates his obsequies.”

Wordsworth, too, in his “Excursion:”—

“The Poets, in their elegies and songs
Lamenting the departed, call the groves,
They call upon the hills and streams to mourn,
And senseless rocks; nor idly; for they speak
In these their invocations, with a voice
Obedient to the strong creative power
Of human passion. Sympathies there are
More tranquil, yet perhaps of kindred birth,
That steal upon the meditative mind,
And grow with thought.”

The writings of Hugh Miller are so thoroughly identified with his native town and its remarkable scenery that there is scarcely an object but what has

been invested with an interest of no common kind. Everything has its associations in connection with some feature or other in his life, character, and education. On the evening of the day that I left Cromarty I had climbed the old coast line which rises immediately behind the town, in order to get from its summit one last, "longing, lingering look" of the country before I sailed for Inverness on my way southward, when my attention was directed to an old, sorry, dilapidated building, not half a bowshot away. The roof is broken, the windows freely admit not only the light but the elements as well; the doors are choked up with nettles, and should you approach to look inside, the damp, mouldy walls, and the decaying, ghostly pews, are the sights that reward your curiosity. The churchyard which surrounds the building adds additional loneliness to the scene. I sat down upon a grave-stone, and was revolving in my own mind whether or not this building, going so fast to demolition, was the Gaelic Chapel which had been erected by Mr Ross for the benefit of the poor Highlanders who came to Cromarty in search of employment. In the course of a conversation with an old man who had come to take home his horse which was quietly grazing in the churchyard, I learned that it was even so. Here was a new object of interest—one which I should not have liked to lose a sight of before leaving the neighbourhood. It was in some matters connected with this same chapel that Hugh Miller first became involved in those ecclesiastical controversies with which his name is so much associated. It may be well, at this point, to advert very briefly to the course of train-

ing which, in early life, he had undergone, and which may be said to have fitted him to take such a leading part in the great controversy which afterwards split up the Scottish Church into two great sections. The family circle in which Hugh Miller had been reared were not only pious, devout, and respected members of society, but also deeply imbued with all the stirring ecclesiastical traditions of their country and their church. Indeed, how could they be otherwise? for one of their own immediate ancestors was the venerable Donald Roy, the patriarch of Nigg, who, on the occasion of the presbytery meeting in the empty church to proceed with the settlement of an unpopular presentee, solemnly protested against the mockery of such a proceeding, by declaring "that if they settled a man to the *walls* of that kirk, the blood of the parish of Nigg would be required at their hands."

At the different schools which Hugh Miller attended, he got about as much of scriptural knowledge as of the other branches professedly taught there. His uncles, however, in this department, as in all the others, came to the rescue. In their house every Sabbath evening, he, along with his sisters and cousins, was regularly subjected to a rigid examination and cross-examination first on the Shorter Catechism and then on the Mother's. Though on these occasions the trains of argument and the passages of application were always lost, yet the instructions of these good men were seed sown for a future day. Their upright, Christian life and example daily illustrated the good principles they sought to implant in the minds of their youthful charge. Their teaching, both by precept and practice,

was not labour in vain; it brought forth fruit most abundantly in future years. It was Uncle James that introduced him to the legendary histories of Wallace and Bruce at an early age; and as the writer of an admirable and eloquent article in *The Witness*, a few days after the death of its lamented editor, says in allusion to the eagerness with which he read these histories, "the occupation had its use. It gave him a capacity for admiring what was great though perilous in exploit, and for truly and largely sympathising with what was patriotic and self-sacrificing in character; and so it created a groundwork for his own future thinking and acting. The admiration he then bore to these earliest of our 'Scottish Worthies,' who vindicated on Bannockburn and kindred fields, Scotland's right to be an independent and free country, he afterwards transferred to our later 'Worthies,' whom he revered as greater still. Not that he ever lost his admiration of the former, or ceased to value the incalculable services they rendered to the Scottish nation; but that he regarded Knox and Melville as men occupying a yet higher platform—as gifted with a yet deeper insight into their country's wants—as, in short, carrying forward and consummating the glorious task which Wallace and Bruce had but begun. He saw that unless our reformers had come after our heroes, planting schools, founding colleges, and, above all, imparting to their countrymen a scriptural and rational faith, in vain had Bruce unsheathed his sword—in vain had Wallace laid down his life. Wallace and Bruce had created an independent country; Knox and Melville had created an independent people. They were the

creators of the Scottish nation—the real enfranchisers of our people; and it was this that taught Mr Miller to venerate these men so profoundly, and that made him in his inmost soul a devoted follower, and to the utmost extent of his great faculties a defender of their cause. He was a soldier from love—pure, heroic, chivalrous devotion soaring infinitely above the partisan.”

Cromarty had always been fortunate in its parish ministers, consequently the cause of the Established Church was there very strong, while that of Dissent was extremely weak. There being, therefore, no antagonists to contend with outside her pale, it was quite natural that some should be found within it. In process of time the case of the Gaelic Chapel occurred—a dire ecclesiastical dispute, which set the good folks of Cromarty all together by the ears. “Cromarty,” says the author of “My Schools and Schoolmasters,” “originally a lowland settlement, had had from the Reformation, down till the latter quarter of the last century, no Gaelic place of worship. On the breaking up of the feudal system, however, the Highlanders began to drop into the place in quest of employment; and George Ross, affected for their uncared-for religious condition, built for them, at his own expense, a chapel, and had influence enough to get an endowment for its minister from the Government.” The minister presented to the Gaelic congregation, although hardly the man whom the members would have chosen for themselves, had, notwithstanding, some popular points about him. “Though, not of high talent, he was frank and genial, and visited often, and conversed much; and at

length the Highlanders came to regard him as the very *beau ideal* of a minister." He and Mr Stewart, who had been about the same time appointed to the parish church, belonged to the antagonist parties in the church. The latter "took his place in the old Presbyterian section, under Chalmers and Thomson; while the Gaelic minister held by Drs Inglis and Cook." Now commenced a serious controversy in church matters at Cromarty; and as it was the means of introducing Hugh Miller upon a new arena, it may be worth while to detail the circumstances.

The English congregation, from its being composed of the *élite* of Cromarty, could hardly be supposed to be jealous of its neighbour the Gaelic one—a body of labourers and weavers. As was, perhaps, perfectly natural in the circumstances, just the reverse took place, the latter began to be jealous of the former; "they were poor people," they used sometimes to say, "but their souls were as precious as those of the richer folk, and they were surely as well entitled to have their rights as the English people." Their minister thought so too, and accordingly to secure those rights "he petitioned the Presbytery of the district, either to be assigned a parish within the bounds of the Parish of Cromarty, or to have the charge erected into a collegiate one, and his half of it, of course, rendered co-ordinate with Mr Stewart's."

The English congregation became at once very angry and very much alarmed; they had no desire to be under the charge of a minister whom they had not yet learned to appreciate. Mr Stewart himself liked the movement ill; so a vigorous resistance was determined

upon. Counter petitions were soon got up and sent to the Presbytery, praying, as a first step in the process, that copies of the Gaelic minister's documents should be served upon them. The Presbytery complied with the terms of the prayer, but the Gaelic minister, nothing daunted, appealed to the General Assembly, on the ground that the people had no business to appear in the matter at all. And so the English "people had next to petition that venerable court in behalf of what they deemed their imperilled rights; while the Gaelic congregation, under the full impression that their overbearing English neighbours were treating them 'as if they had no souls,' got up a counter petition, virtually to the effect that the parish might either be cut in two, and the half of it given to their minister, or that he might be at least made second minister to every man in it. The minister, however, finding at the General Assembly that the ecclesiastical party, on whose support he had relied, were opposed *in toto* to the erection of chapels of ease into regular charges, and that the peculiarities of the case were such as to cut off all chance of his being supported by their opponents, fell from his appeal, and the case was never called into court."

While these disputes were waging, was it possible that such a young man as Hugh Miller could stand and look calmly on? Always more ecclesiastical than political in his leanings, he felt that the religious side in any quarrel had a claim upon him. "I took," he says, "an active part in this controversy; wrote petitions and statements for my brother parishioners, with paragraphs for the local newspapers, and a long

letter for the *Caledonian Mercury*, in reply to a tissue of misrepresentations which appeared in that print, from the pen of one of the Gaelic minister's legal agents; and finally, I replied to a pamphlet by the same hand, which, though miserable as a piece of writing—for it resembled no other composition ever produced, save, mayhap, a very badly-written law paper—contained statements which I deemed it necessary to meet. And such were my first attempts in the rough field of ecclesiastical controversy—a field into which inclination would never have led me, but which has certainly lain very much in my way, and in which I have spent many a laborious hour.”

But greater events were at hand. The period intervening between 1834 and 1843 was a memorable one in the history of the Church of Scotland. The enforcement of the *Veto Act* was resisted in the Court of Session, whose decision in favour of the patrons was confirmed on appeal to the House of Lords. This, however, was far from settling matters; the claims of patronage on the one hand, and the rights of the people on the other, were more eagerly discussed than ever. It was an exciting time, and it was then that Hugh Miller saw what a critical position the church was in; till then he never knew how much he valued her, nor had ever felt how strong and numerous the associations were that bound her to his affections. “Could I do nothing for my church in her hour of peril?” he asked himself. “I tossed wakefully throughout a long night,” he says, “in which I formed my plan of taking up the purely popular side of the question; and in the morning I sat down to state my views to the people in the

form of a letter addressed to Lord Brougham." The history of this famous pamphlet is well known. It at once attracted the attention of the evangelical party in the church, who, thereupon, invited its author to become the editor of a journal about to be started which should advocate their views. After some hesitation, he accepted the proposed editorship, and on the 15th of January, 1840, appeared the first number of *The Witness*, which immediately took up its position as the organ of the non-intrusion party, and ultimately attained to a place among our first-class Scottish newspapers.

The great mission, however, which Hugh Miller felt himself called upon to originate and establish, was to make all his investigations and discoveries in geology bear upon the defence and elucidation of the Word of God. His life-long labours in its behalf reached their consummation on that memorable morning when he was so suddenly called away from amongst us. "His very intellect, his reason,—God's most precious gift,—a gift dearer than life,—perished in the great endeavour to harmonise the works and word of the Eternal."

The hour has now come when I must bid farewell to Cromarty, to all its intensely interesting associations, and to all the friends who treated the "stranger within their gates" so kindly. There is an unwonted stir in the little harbour. Yonder is the steamer,—scarcely discernible in the twilight,—on her passage down from Invergordon. I step into the little boat with all the

precious specimens which I had collected carefully packed away in my bag, and am rowed outside the harbour, almost under the guns of the Pembroke, and lie to for a few minutes. The steamer arrives; it is the little Samson, and there is the cabin-boy who lost his cap, looking perfectly happy and contented, notwithstanding. I step on board; ere long Cromarty fades from my view, the reign of twilight ends, and I can distinguish nothing but the great, dark mass of granitic rocks overhanging the sea. In the solemn stillness of the night, I can hear the deep boom of the waves in the old rocky caverns of the southern Sutor. It is like the wail of mourning for the departed,—for him who loved so well to linger there, searching their dark recesses, reading their stony records, revealing their hidden inscriptions, and setting them forth as a Testimony to the everlasting truths recorded of old in the Sacred Scriptures. Farewell to Cromarty!





